PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1992-93

COMPRISING PERIOD
17 May—27 May 1993

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-SECOND YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES — VOLUME 225

NINETEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1992-93

House of Commons

Monday 17 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Student Grants

1. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total expenditure by local education authorities in Wales during 1992-93 on discretionary grants; how many students benefited; and what are the corresponding estimates for 1993-94.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): Local authority expenditure on discretionary student awards amounted to £16·8 million in 1991-92. Provisional information suggests that in the academic year 1991-92, some 14,800 students received discretionary awards from authorities in Wales. This is the latest year for which the information is available.

Mr. Williams: The Minister will realise that, because of the stringent expenditure limits imposed by the Welsh Office, many local authorities in Wales have made severe cuts in discretionary grants. In Dyfed, where my constituency is, there has been a 50 per cent. cut, which means £700,000 less in discretionary grants this year. I am sure that everyone agrees that education and training have a critical role to play in the recovery of the Welsh economy. In its report, "Wales 2010", issued last week, the Institute of Welsh Affairs placed education and training at the centre of its strategy. What does the Welsh Office intend to do about cuts in discretionary grants that will deprive hundreds of people in Dyfed and thousands of people across Wales of the support that they need to follow courses in further education?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am sorry to hear that Dyfed is proposing such a cut. The grants are discretionary, which means that local authorities have the power but not the duty, so it is no use blaming the Welsh Office—the hon. Gentleman should blame the local authorities. I am particularly sad about Dyfed, as in 1991-92 it allocated £2·9 million towards discretionary awards—the highest level of any county in Wales. I hope that those responsible will change their minds.

Mr. Roger Evans: Will my right hon. Friend assist the House by putting the answer to the question in the context of the numbers of people who now undergo further and higher education? How has that figure changed over the past 10 years and what are the present prospects?

Sir Wyn Roberts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There has been a substantial increase in higher education. Student numbers have risen 20 per cent. in the past three years. We expect an increase of 10 per cent. in the number of further education students this year, on top of an increase of 55 per cent. since 1988-89.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister accept that he has given complacent answers to the questions posed? Is he aware that thousands of young men and women in Wales have been denied further and higher education, as a direct result of the cuts that he has imposed on Welsh local education authorities, and parents and teachers in Wales are sick and tired of the Government's arrogant refusal to listen to anyone involved in education, whether on the subject of testing or on the teaching of English? Does he accept that education in Wales relies heavily on stability and resources and when will he give them to the Welsh people?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, seeks to blame the Government. We are talking about discretionary grants, which are allocated at the discretion of the local authorities. We have increased the amount of revenue support available to local authorities. Their largest bill is for teachers' salaries and the increase there has been pegged at 1·5 per cent. Local authorities have a responsibility for our young people and I urge them, particularly the Labour local authorities in Wales, to consider the matter further.

Diabetics

2. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that there is active support from hospital trusts and directly managed units for care of diabetics via community care.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): Social services departments are responsible for assessing diabetic needs in discussion with the NHS and doctors; this is being guided by the relevant health gain protocol, a copy of which I hope that the hon. Gentleman has received.

Mr. Wardell: In view of the St. Vincent declaration to which the Government are a signatory, how does the Minister intend to assess the extent to which diabetics will enjoy a reduction in the number of complications, such as eye complications, as a result of the declaration, given that hospitals in Wales do not possess the means to collect the data to establish whether the targets have been or will be reached? Will he make sure that the data are collected and put in the hands of the district hospitals?

Mr. Jones: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that much important work is being done in this area following the setting up of the working party, which I regard as a most important source for informing health authorities and others as they devise their local strategies for health. As I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows, we have set targets under the protocol for a reduction by the year 2002 of one half in diabetic gangrene, one third in end stage renal failure and one third in new blindness.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely right that the trusts should make the decisions concerning their areas instead of being told what to do by people in Cathays Park or Gwydyr house in Whitehall?

Mr. Jones: I can fully reassure my hon. Friend that the changes in the national health service have brought about exactly what he seeks. Now there are clear-cut responsibilities. It is not Cathays Park but the health authorities which are the strategic planners, and the trusts, of which there are increasing numbers in Wales, are providing exactly the sort of health care that the people of Wales need.

EC Committee of the Regions

3. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how Wales's representatives on the European Committee of the Regions will be selected or elected.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): Final decisions will be taken once the Maastricht treaty has been ratified.

Mr. Jones: I find that answer rather puzzling as I was under the impression that at least four Members on the Opposition side of the House knew how these people are to be selected or elected. When will the Secretary of State lift the veil of secrecy over this issue and allow the House and the 3 million inhabitants of Wales to know what that little cabal apparently already knows?

Mr. Hunt: Whatever the official Opposition may seek to imply, Wales is a pluralist democracy and I am determined to ensure that our representation on the Committee of the Regions will reflect that. I hope that at some stage the official Opposition will make it clear whether they still broadly support the treaty signed at Maastricht. Since I entered politics, I have seen six major U-turns by the Labour party on Europe, and I believe that that party is going to adopt six different positions on the Maastricht treaty this week. That is incredible. It is about time the Opposition were serious about Europe.

Mr. Kinnock: In the name of a pluralist and open democracy, will the Secretary of State tell us whether he has any form of written agreement with the Welsh nationalist party? Does he realise that if he continues to deny the existence of such an agreement he calls into question the integrity of the Leader of Plaid Cymru?

Mr. Hunt: I have always made it clear that I do have an agreement in writing with the Leader of Plaid Cymru. In return, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us whether he intends to support the treaty of Maastricht this week——

Madam Speaker: Order. That is going wide of the question.

Mr. Hunt: When considering the Committee of the Regions we need to know whether the right hon. Gentleman still agrees with his original words—that the Labour party was broadly in support of the treaty signed at Maastricht.

Mr. Wigley: Is it not the case that under the secret deal cobbled up by the Labour party with the local government associations in London, Wales would have only two seats out of the 24, compared with the three or four that are now likely to come to Wales? Labour's amendment to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill contained no guarantee whatever that those seats would be distributed to any but one party, or that they would be distributed geographically in Wales; nor was there a guarantee of any reporting-back mechanism. Is it not time that the Labour party gave up fighting yesterday's battle, which it lost so badly, and started arguing positively for the good of Wales in Europe?

Mr. Hunt: I agree with the Leader of the Plaid Cymru *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Hunt: I hope that Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen will cease such behaviour. I completely agree with you, Madam Speaker, that it does not enhance respect for the House to have Labour Front-Bench spokesmen behaving in such a manner. I am extremely pleased to inform the House that the regional development section of the European Community Economic and Social Committee will visit south Wales next month to hold one

of its regular formal meetings. That meeting in Cardiff, will be hosted by the Welsh Office and it will be the first time in many years that the Committee has left Brussels. I shall be delighted to welcome it to Wales.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my right hon. Friend agree that by supporting the Committee of the Regions the Opposition are showing a degree of double standards because they support the Maastricht treaty in its entirety instead of——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. I have had enough of Members going wide of the question.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I wish to put a simple question to the Secretary of State. Bearing in mind that the Committee of the Regions is not a parliamentary committee, does he regard it as relevant that at the last general election the Liberal Democrats won 60,000 more votes in Wales than Plaid Cymru?

Mr. Hunt: That is, of course, a factor to be taken into account, as is the factor that the Liberal Democrats' representation in the House came down from three to one. The only reason why the hon. and learned Gentleman is leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats in the House is that he is the only one left.

Mr. Ron Davies: We are all wondering why the Secretary of State is so determined to avoid giving straight answers to straight questions on this. It is clear that his personal preference is for the posts to be filled by unfettered patronage, but that preference has been overridden by a decision of the House. Will he therefore confirm that he will comply fully with the spirit of that decision? Since our Welsh representatives will now be drawn from local government and will represent Welsh local government interests, does he agree that local government itself should decide on its own representatives? Does he understand that any veto, trickery or gerrymandering by him will be completely unacceptable?

Mr. Hunt: I have already given a straight answer to the question posed by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). I said that I have a written agreement with the Leader of Plaid Cymru, which I shall honour. I understand that this week there is to be a great unveiling of new proposals for a Welsh assembly with fund-raising and legislative powers. It is disgraceful that the hon. Gentleman did not mention that in the House although he had an opportunity to do so. The sooner he comes clean in the House rather than retiring to Llandudno for some party political occasion, the more I shall respect him. He has to decide how he will vote on Thursday. Will he support his right hon. Friend? Does he still support the Maastricht treaty? If not, there can never be a Committee of the Regions and that would be a great shame for Wales.

Higher Education (Research)

4. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to enhance the quality of research in the higher education sector in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have asked the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales to work with the higher education institutions in Wales to raise the quality of research. We have made an additional £2·9 million available in 1993-94, to enable the council to make a start on the task and to assist the former public sector institutions to establish research departments.

Mr. Richards: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but can he tell us the total amount available for research into higher education in Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: Yes, it is about £35 million, which is rather more than the higher education sector secured from the Universities Funding Council last year. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it is vital for the future well-being of the Welsh economy that we should concentrate on research and innovation and seek to apply it from the higher education sector to industry and business in Wales.

Planning Decisions

5. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning decisions by Welsh planning authorities he has called in during the last two years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Twelve.

Mr. Llwyd: Given that no planning permission has been revoked by the Welsh Office in the past two years, is it not time to confirm the view of many senior planning officers in Wales that they are not being given sufficient monitoring and assistance by the Welsh Office as they try to uphold the structure plans? When is the Welsh Office likely to introduce an element of flexibility into rural planning so that villages are allowed to grow naturally and not die?

Mr. Jones: Revocation is a seldom-used power. Normally we would expect planning decisions to be made properly by local planning authorities. That is why the power is so seldom used. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we look for an appropriate approach in all structure plans to cover rural areas.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that the decision of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales to allow Radnorshire district council to decide the wind farm project at Bryntitli near Rhayader in my constituency has been warmly welcomed by my constituents? Is it not a further illustration of the fact that local democracy demands that, within the overall planning framework, decisions of that nature should be decided at local level?

Mr. Jones: I am happy to acknowledge my hon. Friend's warm welcome for our right hon. Friend's decision.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Why do the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State so persistently overrule local planning authorities, as they did over Browning Ferris, which was a despicable decision after a contrary unanimous decision by Newport borough council? Will the Minister reconsider the Welsh Office's attitude to such matters—which are better decided locally, as his hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) has just advised him?

Mr. Jones: A the hon. Gentleman knows, that matter was considered fully and I cannot make any further comment.

Patients Charter

6. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in Wales in meeting the targets set out in the patients charter.

Mr. David Hunt: We are achieving the waiting times guarantees set out in the patients charter and have made considerable progress towards meeting the other standards set in it.

Mr. Sweeney: Does my right hon. Friend agree that waiting times for a first out-patient appointment are just as important as those after seeing a consultant? Will he consider setting a target for such appointments?

Mr. Hunt: That is a very good point. I am happy to be able to say that from April next year we are prepared to set a target of two years from referral by general practitioners —*[Interruption.]* We are talking about the total number of cases. A target of two years from referral by the GP will apply to all cases, but that will not affect the target of one month for urgent treatment.

Mr. Llew Smith: If the Minister thinks that the patients charter is working, can he explain why there are approximately 1 million people on hospital waiting lists in the United Kingdom and why they are increasing by 1,000 per week? To deal with the problems of waiting lists, can he tell me how much of the £8 million promised for a hospital in Blaenau Gwent during the late 1980s has been spent?

Mr. Hunt: The latter point is a matter for the health authority locally. The charter for patients in Wales is backed up by record resources. I give the hon. Gentleman one simple statistic. When we came into power in 1979, gross expenditure per capita on the NHS in Wales was £171. In this financial year, that has increased to £713 per capita—a rate of increase far higher than the rate of inflation. We are now targeting that record level of expenditure on the patients so as to improve patient care. That is what the patients charter in Wales is all about.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Secretary of State agree that little progress will be made on the patients charter if things carry on as they have been for the past month in the Prince of Wales orthopaedic hospital in my constituency, where the number of orthopaedic operations carried out since 1 April is 50 per cent. down on last year, where last week alone eight knee and hip joint replacement operations were cancelled, and where a new operating theatre—construc ted following lobbying by me and the medical profession in the area and with great support from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones)—has been used only twice in the six weeks since it was handed over by the builders? With that rate of progress, the patients charter can be forgotten for orthopaedic operations in the Cardiff area for a very long time to come.

Mr. Hunt: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is making constituency points from the Front Bench. The South Glamorgan health authority has made very good progress in cutting the in-patient waiting list. Since October 1991, the total in-patient list has come down by 27 per cent., and the percentage of people waiting more than one year for non-urgent in-patient treatment has fallen by 33 per cent. The hon. Gentleman implicitly criticises all the local staff who are doing such a marvellous job in achieving those targets.

Education and Training Targets

7. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he has taken to ensure that national education and training targets will be met; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have made it clear to education, training and employer organisations throughout Wales that we attach great importance to the national education and training targets. We have taken a number of measures in consultation with the training and enterprise councils and other partners to secure an ambitious rate of progress towards their achievement.

Mr. Knox: Will my right hon. Friend be more specific about the role of TECs and colleges in achieving those targets?

Sir Wyn Roberts: Certainly. We have invited the TECs in Wales to form local strategic groups and to fix provisional local targets and planned joint action. We have also asked the Further Education Funding Council for Wales to encourage colleges to work very closely with the TECs to develop those local targets and strategies for achieving them.

Dr. Marek: The Minister will know that North-East Clwyd TEC has decided, instead of spending its money on training, to spend it on plush new offices with armchairs and first-class restaurants for itself and its staff. At the same time, I am continually getting complaints from still unemployed ex-Brymbo steel workers that training has not been up to the standard that was expected. It is high time the Minister brought those TECs under control and told them to spend the money where it should be spent—on training.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The TECs are very well resourced. Certainly, they are better resourced than they were last year as far as training is concerned. I have no objection personally to the provision of good capital facilities for training and enterprise councils and for further education colleges as those colleges have been starved of funds under the local education authorities in years gone by. We have a lot of capital investment to do before our facilities reach the right level in Wales.

Angling

8. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has had from angling organisations in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Secretary of State for that comprehensive reply. Among those representations, did he receive complaints from angling associations about the proposals of the National Rivers Authority to make good the shortfall in Government grant, which in 1996 will drop from 54 to 30 per cent? If the proposals are implemented, the local waters of Wales will be put out of the reach of

Welsh anglers. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the NRA to look for other sources of funding, rather than looking to the anglers of Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I am aware of the NRA's proposals to raise additional revenue by making a charge on fisheries' owners. The NRA is responsible for the allocation of resources between its regions. No proposals have yet been submitted to Ministers. I am aware that the NRA has put forward some proposals to conserve salmon and sea trout stocks in the NRA's Welsh region. We are considering the objections that we have received to those proposals.

Training and Further Education

9. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for Government spending on training and further education in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The resources available for training and further education in Wales in 1993-94 total almost £290 million. A further £6·2 million for learning for work, business start-up and training and enterprise council challenge was announced in the Budget on 16 March.

Mr. Coombs: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that comprehensive and carefully researched answer. What progress has been made in meeting the youth training guarantee?

Sir Wyn Roberts: Meeting the youth training guarantee is a high priority and resources have been made available for that. Last September, 1,550 young people were awaiting placements under that scheme. I am glad to tell the House that, as of April, the number had dropped to 260.

Mr. Rowlands: Will the Minister answer the parliamentary question that I have tabled three times during the past six weeks: will TEC budgets for 1993-94 be increased or decreased? Will there be an increase, as there should be, or will there be a cut of 8 to 10 per cent., as most of the TECs believe will happen?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman that we will not announce the individual TEC budgets because the TECs are in negotiation with training providers. We shall make the budgets known in about October, when those negotiations have been completed. We are providing £146·7 million for training and enterprise support this year and the TECs come within that budget. I assure the hon. Gentleman, as I have done before in reply to another of his questions, that the TECs will be well provided for.

Mr. Richards: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be a real improvement in the capital budgets of further education colleges, following many years of neglect by local education authorities under the control of the Labour party? I refer especially to Llandrillo college in my constituency, which has had to use Portakabins for many years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am aware of the deficiencies in our further education colleges, including Llandrillo. I am delighted to say that we are making £13·9 million of capital available for the improvement of further education colleges—following, as my hon. Friend said, years of neglect by Labour local education authorities.

Voluntary Organisations

10. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to increase the support provided by the Welsh Office for voluntary organisations in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Substantial sums of taxpayers' money continue to be provided and the Government intend to maintain their commitment to a flourishing voluntary sector in Wales.

Mr. Michael: In other words, the Minister will not give any more money to the voluntary sector in Wales. Does not he realise that essential to the health of the community is a strong partnership between local authorities and voluntary organisations, especially youth organisations? That is being undermined because of the mean and petty cuts in the finance made available to local authorities by the Welsh Office. If, because they have to pull back to their statutory responsibilities, local authorities are unable to fund voluntary organisations, the Secretary of State for Wales should provide far more to make up the shortfall. Will the Minister give an undertaking that he will do that?

Mr. Jones: I can simply refute the hon. Gentleman's allegations by reminding him that we have increased funding for the voluntary sector by one third in the past five years and threefold during the lifetime of this Government.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Recently, I wrote to the Secretary of State about funding for the Powys mental health project, which is in the voluntary sector. Is the Minister aware of widespread concern in rural Wales about increasing depressive illness and even suicide among farmers? Will he examine seriously the possibility of funding projects such as the Powys mental health project, which can, through the voluntary sector, be of such great assistance to farmers facing psychiatric illness?

Mr. Jones: Yes, I am more than happy to consider the specific project to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred. I seek to reassure him by saying that, in general, funding of the mental handicap strategy in Wales for the current financial year has increased by 15 per cent.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Minister will be aware that a number of people in the voluntary sector are becoming active in assisting those with a drug dependency. There have been problems in my constituency recently, as I am sure the Minister is aware. The local branch of Llangefni drugs council within Gwynedd drugs council is seeking funding to develop services for people who have a drug dependency. Will the Minister sympathetically consider its funding application?

Mr. Jones: Yes, I will consider that particular application also. On 1 April, the Welsh Office issued a circular to all Welsh county councils reminding them what is involved in support for alcohol and drug dependency services. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the action point that local authorities should plan for continuity of services for alcohol and drug misusers under the new community care arrangements. As a priority, they should ensure that the implementation of social care plans properly reflects the needs of those groups. In general, funding for care in the community has increased by more than £8 million.

Mr. Ron Davies: The Secretary of State is getting something of a reputation for being demob happy. Given the complacency of the Under-Secretary of State's answer, it is clear that he, too, does not think that he has much of a future at the Welsh Office. Does not the Under-Secretary understand that the voluntary sector depends heavily on local government support? As a result of this year's cuts in local government funding, the voluntary sector, together with vital public services, is having to pay a heavy cost for the Government's failures. Instead of berating and undermining local councils, why do not the Under-Secretary and the Secretary of State get their act together, go to Brussels and make sure that the £75 million of finance that was allocated to Wales this year by the EC —but which has not been taken up—is brought back to Wales, used by local government and allocated to those voluntary sectors that desperately need that money?

Mr. Jones: Again and again, the hon. Gentleman blindly ignores the facts. Community care was to be £28 million this year, but has been increased to £36 million. That is the extent of the increase. If anyone is demob happy, it is the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), who is the third shadow Secretary of State for Wales in the current Parliament—and I guess that the Scottish puppet master is already trawling for the fourth.

Non-standard Working Hours

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of the employed Welsh work force are working non-standard hours.

Mr. David Hunt: There is no single or standard agreed definition of "standard" hours, but the 1991 census shows that 21 per cent. of Welsh residents in employment worked fewer than 31 hours a week.

Mr. Flynn: That figure renders as complete fiction the Secretary of State's claim that he has increased the number of jobs in Wales, because tens of thousands of people in the Welsh work force are counted twice and sometimes three times. Did the Secretary of State notice that in the recent elections, the Conservative party managed to secure only 32 county councillors out of a possible 500 in Wales? That makes the present Secretary of State about as popular as Ceausescu in Romania in December 1990. Will not the Secretary of State confess that there has been no Welsh recovery but that a reasonably paid, highly skilled work force has been turned into a low-wage, low-skill sweat shop?

Mr. Hunt: I heard no expressions of approval following the hon. Gentleman's remarks, which were pretty disgraceful. Any Opposition Member who says that there has been no recovery in Wales and expects to be taken seriously is living in cloud cuckoo land.

I am pleased to announce that, in the past financial year, 190 offers of regional selective assistance have been accepted by companies for projects in Wales worth £73 million, involving investment of £470 million and 12,500 jobs. I can also announce new projects totalling more than £15 million, involving eight companies setting up, modernising or expanding operations in Wales. They plan to create 425 new jobs and to safeguard 156 existing jobs. The hon. Gentleman must be the only Member of Parliament who does not recognise that the Welsh dragon is breathing fire into the United Kingdom recovery.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Terrorist Bomb (City of London)

27. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners what assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the damage done to Church of England property by the recent terrorist bomb in the City of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Church Commissioners have made no assessment, as the future of these buildings—at least initially—is not within their jurisdiction. However, they naturally regret the damage to churches caused by the bomb. I understand that the diocese of London, local clergy and other interested parties will be making such an assessment in due course in the light of professional advice.

Mr. Lidington: Many people who care about the architecture and history of the City of London are particularly concerned about the damage done to St. Ethelburga's church. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Church Commissioners, rather than, as has been reported, trying to sell off the site to make a quick profit, will seek ways of organising an appeal to ensure that the church is fully restored?

Mr. Alison: I assure my hon. Friend that there is no question of the Church Commissioners' trying to sell off the site to make a quick profit, interested though we are in making profits on our property for the benefit of the clergy and their dependants. The disposal of the site and the determination of its future, however, are matters for the diocese and the parochial church council. If they decide that they want to launch an appeal and to develop the site as part of a pastoral reorganisation, the Church Commissioners will have some jurisdiction and will do everything possible to help.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, however important the Church's view on the destruction of its property may be, it has a more important message to deliver—that killing and injuring people, as the IRA has done, is entirely unacceptable? Does he agree that the Church should be encouraged at every opportunity to make it clear to the IRA that there is only a difference of degree between what it does in the City of London and what others are currently doing in the former Yugoslavia?

Mr. Alison: I entirely support what the hon. Gentleman has said. He will recall, as I do, the many vivid photographs of churches and other buildings in London burning after the attacks of the totalitarian Hitler regime in the last war. Terrorists are totalitarian, and their attacks on London will be as abortive and ineffectual as Hitler's attacks.

Rents

29. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners by what percentage in real terms rents for Church lands were changed in the years 1987 to 1992.

Mr. Alison: The average gross rent per acre in respect of the Church Commissioners' agricultural land increased by 6·5 per cent., from £56·84 in 1987 to £60·53 in 1992. That compared to an increase in the retail prices index of 34·8 per cent. over the same period, representing a reduction of 28 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Flynn: Does that figure include a premium charged by the Church to allow its tenants to permit the tormenting of dumb animals on their land in the name of sport by allowing fox hunting and deer hunting? Is not the right hon. Gentleman embarrassed that at the international whaling conference and elsewhere, Britain has been criticised by Japan and Norway for allowing hunting on our land? Does not that undermine entirely——

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman tried to catch my eye during questions on the whaling statement, he might be successful, but it is unfortunate that he should move now to the discussion of a subject that is not at all related to his original question.

Publications

30. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representating the Church Commissioners what plans there are for further publications by the Church Commissioners.

Mr. Alison: The Church Commissioners' annual report and accounts for 1992 are to be published in June, and the 1993 report of the Church Commissioners as central stipend authority will be published in the autumn. The commissioners produce leaflets on a variety of subjects from time to time.

Mr. Marshall: Might the Church Commissioners produce a leaflet on the arguments in favour of women priests, as many people in the House and outside it wish to see women become fully ordained priests of the Church of England? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the uncertainty that is created by the current delay is not good for the Church of England or for those who either support or oppose the measure and that the sooner the matter is determined the better it will be for everyone?

Mr. Alison: I take careful note of what my hon. Friend says, as, no doubt, will colleagues from all parties here and in the other place who serve on the Ecclesiastical Committee, which is to meet later this afternoon and which is now the only possible source of delay. My hon. Friend can be assured that the Ecclesiastical Committee will present to the House for his benefit a comprehensive summary of the arguments for and against the ordination of women, I believe with an endorsement to the effect that the measure is expedient.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Divorce (Welfare of Children)

33. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidance has been issued to courts regarding the consideration to be given to the welfare of children in divorce proceedings.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. John M. Taylor): May I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's expertise in this subject and tell him that the Judicial Studies Board organises training courses for both district judges and specialist circuit judges at which the needs of children are thoroughly discussed? Eminent child psychiatrists, paediatricians, court welfare officers, social workers and academics play important roles in briefing judges on this vital topic, alongside guidance from the Department of Health on the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Wicks: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does he agree, however, that, given that one in four children have parents who are likely to divorce before those children reach the age of 16, it is high time that his Department introduced proposals to implement the Law Commission's report aimed at putting children first in divorce proceedings? Are the costs of conciliation the reason for the delay? If so, does the Minister agree that the social, emotional and financial costs of a failure to act to help children are greater than the costs of implementation?

Mr. Taylor: It was, is and will continue to be the policy of the Lord Chancellor's Department that the child's welfare is the paramount consideration. Many of us have sympathy for the parting parents, but the children are the paramount priority and the Department is well seized of that fact.

Stockton-on-Tees County Court

34. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the future of Stockton-on-Tees county court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is currently undertaking wide consultation on the proposed closure of Stockton-on-Tees county court. No final decision will be made on the future of the court until the results of that consultation are known.

Mr. Devlin: Given that, last week, the Local Government Commission made the welcome recommendation that county Cleveland should be abolished and replaced with unitary authorities, will my hon. Friend delay making any final decision on Stockton-on-Tees county court until the new unitary authorities are decided upon, as one of them will be Stockton-on-Tees and as there will be a consequent reversal of the policy of centralising all facilities in Middlesbrough?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend is as vigorous as ever in his pursuit of his constituency interests. He will not draw me into making any comment about Cleveland, however—nor do I think that he would want me to. The point that he made may be relevant to the consultation that is in progress, but it is not for me to prejudge its outcome and I am sure that the House would not expect me to do so.

Mr. Boateng: Is the Minister aware of the concern—not only in Stockton-on-Tees county court but in other county courts up and down the country—about reports over the weekend of the Government's intention to privatise the court services? Is he further aware that that concern is widespread, bearing in mind that disastrous impact of privatisation on other aspects of the justice system that we have witnessed over recent weeks and months? When does the Minister intend to make a statement to the House

about that and what proposals will he introduce to ensure that the confidentiality and best interests of the consumers of legal services are properly safeguarded?

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right to lay out the priorities as he did in the conclusion of his question; it is the consumers and users whose interests must be considered as the most important. I am aware of certain press comment during the weekend along the lines that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but it is not always from sources of the greatest possible fidelity, as I am sure he will know from his own experience, as I do from mine. Consideration has been given to the court service becoming an agency under the next steps arrangements. Such thoughts are current and are being very carefully deliberated on.

Legal Aid

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effect of changes in legal aid eligibility arrangements upon the number of women seeking injunctions to restrain a violent partner.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Almost half of all households are now eligible for civil legal aid. A woman seeking an injunction against a violent partner would have her means assessed separately from those of her partner and for this reason may be more likely to qualify than the overall eligibility figure suggests.

Mr. Cohen: May I tell the Minister of a constituent of mine whose violent partner was pestering her but who could not get an injunction because, although she had low earnings, she just fell outside the new legal aid limit? The police told her that they were limited in their actions because they did not have an injunction to enforce. Is not this a serious loophole in the new legal aid limit? Does not that mean that many women at risk of assault will be without court protection? What will the Government do about that?

Mr. Taylor: I do not think that the House would expect me to comment on an individual case. Civil legal aid is available, with a contribution, to up to 48 per cent. of households and very generous allowances are made in the determination of disposable income. The amended regulations provide that, from 12 April, attendance allowance, disability living allowance, constant attendance allowance paid as an increase to a disablement pension and any payment out of the social fund will be disregarded in the calculation of disposable income for advice and assistance. If the hon. Gentleman wrote to me about the case in point, I would gladly receive his letter.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend tell the House by how much expenditure on legal aid has risen since 1979? Am I right in saying that it has increased 10-fold since then?

Mr. Taylor: In 1979, legal aid covered about 900,000 participants and that figure has now gone up to 3·1 million. In the past four years, the cost of legal aid has doubled and it now stands at £1·1 billion. Contrary to all that is being said about legal aid being cut, it is set to go on rising significantly over the next three years, and the number of participants receiving legal aid is set to rise from 3·1 million to 4 million.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Minister aware that the position of women who have been subjected to violence and have had to come before the courts was brought home with stark and appealing directness at the Conservative party conference in Scotland by that courageous woman—who was described as "Judy"—who highlighted the difficulties that people in those circumstances face? Did the Minister notice in particular what she said about the desirability of having a female member on each appeal court Bench? Will he give some help on that?

Mr. Taylor: I should like to reflect on the second and rather specific point raised by the hon. Gentleman. As to the first point about women's vulnerability in court, the Lord Chancellor and I are sympathetic towards that matter, as we are towards the vulnerability of children in court and in cases involving their parents. A court can be a hostile, unnatural, awesome and frightening place for people who have experienced fear and trouble already. The process must be made more congenial to people and every sympathy for their needs must be shown.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Minister agree that the eligibility alterations have affected one class of women above all others—women who are working wives and mothers and who have a separate income, which now means that they are not able to obtain legal aid? Very often, children are involved. Will the Minister for once accept that people are being hurt by his Department and his Government?

Mr. Taylor: No one should imagine for a minute that the Lord Chancellor and I considered the recently necessary application of discipline to the legal aid budget with any joy; rather, we did so with a very heavy heart. Nevertheless, the cost of legal aid is set to go on rising. It is available in civil cases to 48 per cent. of the community, and there is no upper limit in criminal cases. As a spokesman in the House of Lords said, our system of legal aid remains almost certainly one of the most generous in the world—that was said by a spokesman for the Labour party.

Contract and Estate (Report)

36. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor intends to introduce legislation to implement Law Commission report No. 174, "Privity of Contract and Estate".

Mr. John M. Taylor: As I announced in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry), on 31 March, *Official Report*, column *198*, the Government have decided, after careful consideration, to implement the Law Commission's recommendations for future leases but not for existing leases. The necessary legislation will be introduced as soon as there is a suitable legislative opportunity, but I cannot predict when such an opportunity will occur.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be impractical to legislate retrospectively? However, in framing any amendments to the law, will he consult all

those involved, especially the professionals who advise on property matters, so that the people who have unwittingly been made bankrupt in these perplexing cases will not be subject to that particular law in the future?

Mr. Taylor: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. He is right to say, and he understands, that it is the careful judgment of the Government that these measures cannot be retrospective. However, the consultation that he urges is valuable; there is a need for it, and he will be pleased to learn that the process has already begun.

Legal Aid

38. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a further statement on changes in the legal aid scheme.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Changes to the permanent payment on account scheme for barristers came into effect on 1 April. Changes to the financial conditions for legal aid came into effect on 12 April. Standard fees are to be introduced in the magistrates courts on 1 June.

Mr. Vaz: Further to the inadequate reply that the Minister gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), is he aware that reported cases of domestic violence in London have increased by 1,000 per cent. in eight years and that for the victims of domestic violence legal representation is very much a case of the difference between life and death? If evidence is brought before the Minister or the Lord Chancellor to show that justice has been denied because of the increase in payment being required of the Department, will he reverse the savage cuts?

Mr. Taylor: I would not be able to reverse the decision even if I wanted to because it was a decision taken by the House with a majority of 49 votes. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Lord Chancellor and I are receptive to evidence. The answer is, of course we are.

Solicitors (Rights of Audience)

39. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what progress is being made in extending rights of audience to solicitors in the higher courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Law Society submitted its formal application for extended rights of audience in November 1992. The Lord Chancellor and the four designated judges will be in a position to reach a decision on the application when they receive the advice of the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct and of the Director General of Fair Trading later in the summer.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend will be aware that there is widespread concern about the savings that have had to be made by the Lord Chancellor's Department in relation to legal aid. There is also great concern about the committee's slow progress in extending solicitors' rights which, in the circumstances, would clearly lead to a substantial financial saving. There have been recent reports that the Government legal service and Crown Prosecution Service's lawyers are not to be recommended to receive the extended rights of audience in the higher courts. Will my hon. Friend consider those proposals carefully because, in the circumstances, there is clearly an unanswerable case for solicitors to be granted those rights?

Mr. Taylor: I take my hon. Friend's question in exactly the spirit in which it was put. The mechanism for determining wider rights of audience is extremely complicated, not least because the House, in its wisdom, chose to make a complex mechanism when it passed the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. I think that there will be progress fairly soon, but I am bound to say that it will not be quick enough to satisfy my hon. Friend.

Mr. Skinner: Can the Minister explain exactly what is meant by wider rights of audience? Has it got something to do with the Lord Chancellor trotting off to Cyprus to see Asil Nadir? It seems like a shady business to me. A man hands over £440,000 to the Tory party and a member of the Cabinet goes to Cyprus to have some private discussions. Would that apply to anybody else in Britain?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. That is not at all relevant. Does the Minister wish to answer?

Mr. Taylor: I did not want the afternoon to come to an end without Asil Nadir getting in somewhere. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased, but not surprised, to know that Mr. Nadir's legal aid certificate has been frozen.

Whaling

3.30 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the outcome of the International Whaling Commission meeting which ended in Kyoto, Japan, last Friday evening. The meeting was attended by 40 member countries. The United Kingdom team, led by my officials with help from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of the Environment, played an active and prominent role.

I believe that all our key objectives were reached. First and foremost, the IWC's moratorium on all commercial whaling, which has been in place since 1985-86, remains, despite great pressure from Norway and Japan to have it lifted. I think that you would agree, Madam Speaker, that this has been the prime purpose of the United Kingdom and our like-minded allies. We are pleased once again to have achieved it. We argued strongly that we could not agree to its ending, as our essential preconditions to any such consideration have still not been met.

The scientific committee presented some further work on aspects of the revised management procedure. We made it clear that we could not formally accept that as the basis for considering a lifting of the moratorium until and unless we were satisfied on all other aspects of a new scheme, including new observation and inspection procedures and, crucially, acceptable and humane methods of killing whales. We thus opposed again requests from Japan for interim quotas for minke whales in the north Pacific, and we said that we could not accept Norway's plans for coastal whaling.

There was a great deal of further discussion on the proposal, launched at the Glasgow meeting last year, for a circumpolar whale sanctuary in the Antarctic. We again expressed our keen interest and support for this concept, and we co-sponsored resolutions calling for further work on the importance of environmental threats to whale stocks and on their proper management. Some contracting parties argued that they needed more time to study some of the detailed aspects of the sanctuary approach, such as the delineation of boundaries, matters of jurisdiction and future research plans for the sanctuary.

We had warned earlier that that might be the case. We were concerned that matters should not be brought to a head in circumstances in which the whole scheme might come to nothing. At length, the IWC decided that, although it endorsed the concept, it would work to resolve outstanding issues at a special inter-sessional working group. A final decision is planned for the 46th meeting of the IWC next year in Mexico. The United Kingdom will play its major part in ensuring that we achieve that end.

On so-called "scientific whaling", we were critical once more of both the Norwegian and Japanese plans for yet further lethal research on minke whale stocks. Many of us in the House feel that the word "scientific" when used in this way has little to do with the realities.

We have consistently argued that research should, if at all possible, be through non-lethal means. In that regard, we welcomed an offer by Japan to discuss with scientists a programme to look for the reason for the poor recovery of the great whale stocks. That is an encouraging sign and, in the circumstances of our condemnation of many things that have happened, we should welcome it.

We again pressed home at length our concerns about the methods used in whaling operations—including secondary means of killing those whales which do not die from explosive harpoons. We condemned especially the use of the electric lance, which we think is particularly cruel. Some data on humane killing are coming forward following adoption of the United Kingdom's action plan last year, but many serious questions remain. The commission agreed our proposals for a further workshop for 1995. Meanwhile, we shall vigorously maintain our view that present methods are unacceptable.

We also took action on pilot whales in the Faroes, tabling detailed papers and securing IWC support for further studies, noting our concerns about the cruelty of the methods and the organisation of this drive fishery.

Small cetaceans are an area about which I am particularly concerned, because, if we are not careful, our arrangements to protect the larger whales will drive many to take action against smaller cetaceans and cause real depredations in those stocks. We believe that the IWC is fully competent to consider both the larger and smaller cetaceans, and that belief was reinforced.

We fought to secure specific and improved protection for harbour porpoises in the north Atlantic and for striped dolphins. There has been new progress in considering better, co-operative ways of addressing improved means of protecting small cetaceans, many of which are threatened in directed and by-catch fisheries.

The fact that many people do not wish the IWC to uphold what I believe to be its fundamental responsibilities in this area, is a serious matter. Without that, we cannot look at the whole range of cetacean problems as one. Instead, we will find ourselves dealing with the larger animals and thereby, in some senses, endangering species which would otherwise be protected.

The United Kingdom presented a paper and gained consensus support for new IWC studies on whale watching. That is an innovative and benign way of using the world's whale stocks——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister will have plenty of time to watch whales when he gets the sack.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will realise that we are dealing with a serious matter, for which cheap political remarks are not necessary.

As I was saying, that is an innovative and benign way of using the world's whale stocks. It is big business, possibly $0·4 billion currently, and growing rapidly, including in Japan. Our plans for an IWC involvement with studies and recommendations were fully agreed.

Finally, I must mention Norway. I am deeply saddened by her apparent plans to go ahead with commercial whaling. I urge her to reconsider. Many commissioners signed a statement last week underlining the dangers of undermining the commission and its work. The Prime Minister of Norway, in her introduction to the Brundtland report, made it quite clear that, in circumstances where individual nations disagreed with international agreements, they should accept those international agreements even though that may be to their own hindrance. I am sorry that Norway does not take that view on this issue.

Overall, this was a valuable meeting, with excellent results in our further steps towards safeguarding whale stocks. I do hope that the House agrees.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I thank the Minister for his statement on this historic meeting of the International Whaling Commission. The outcome of the meeting should be welcomed by conservationists and environmentalists throughout the world.

I am glad that the Minister referred to the cruelty involved in commercial whaling. The methods of killing whales are horrific; there can be no doubt that they experience great pain and suffering before they die. I hope that the Minister will also endorse the fact that the resumption of commercial whaling will threaten whale stocks. Quotas are not enforceable, and all the evidence shows that people who indulge in commercial whaling will flout the quotas. There can be no alternative to a ban on all whaling.

May I ask the Minister about the proposal for a southern sanctuary south of the 40th southern parallel? He may recall that I wrote to him before the meeting urging the Government to support the proposal. I welcome the fact that the United Kingdom voted for it. Can the Minister tell the House when progress will be made on it? Is it the case that there will be an inter-sessional meeting on the sanction proposal in Australia?

What resources and research are the Government planning to contribute to ensure that this important proposal is properly backed? As the Minister recognises and the House understands, the proposal is important because, if the sanctuary is agreed, it will mean that whales in the southern sanctuary will be properly protected, no matter what happens in the future with regard to commercial whaling.

May I ask the Minister about the proposal by the Japanese, which is accepted, to establish a working group to identify objectives for research into blue whales? I must point out that there is concern that Japan's aim is to attempt to demonstrate that the recovery of the blue whale population is being hindered by the minke whale in order to get some justification for renewed minke whaling. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to keep an eye on that issue.

The Labour party welcomes the fact that the commission passed resolutions condemning the scientific whaling programmes of Norway and Japan, and that the commissioner's statement chastising Norway for its plans to resume commercial whaling was passed. What will the British Government do in response to those resolutions?

I understand that the United States Administration have written to Iceland—which withdrew from the Commission last year to resume commercial whaling—Norway and Japan stating that sanctions will be considered, where appropriate, against countries that choose to ignore the IWC conservation programme and resume commercial whaling without the requisite IWC approval. Can the Minister confirm that the United States has made that communication? For their part, what are the United Kingdom Government doing fully to explore all opportunities for such action?

Will the Minister address the question of Norway's position, taking into account the intention of its Government that Norway should enter the European Community? After all, it is the case that the European Community bans commercial whaling. What sense does it make, and how can it possibly be justified, for Norway to resume commercial whaling and at the same time seek to enter the European Community? Surely it cannot be right for a country to apply to join the European Community if it intends to flout one of the Community's resolutions, and makes no secret of that in the process of joining.

I put it to the Minister that the decisions of the International Whaling Commission are of enormous significance to the future of whale stocks in the seas and to the wider environmental issues. It is one thing to pass resolutions and have all these meetings—what is needed is action to stop the cruelty. In particular, we must judge the situation with regard to the action that is taken to prevent commercial whaling interests in Iceland, Japan and Norway from continuing to damage the whales. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that there is a lot more at stake than whales, important though they are. What is at stake is whether we will have effective United Nations-backed action—the IWC is recognised by the United Nations—to tackle these environmental and conservation issues.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I agree with him entirely about the southern sanctuary. It seemed better to be reticent in advance, simply because I wanted to make it clear that our prime need was to keep the moratorium going. That must be so. We have done the best we could on the southern sanctuary, and I hope that next time we will be able to complete our work. We shall be doing work at the inter-sessional meeting.

We spend £25 million a year on the British Antarctic survey. Much of that money will be a great help in giving the necessary research backing, and there is new MAFF-funded research on the issue. I shall ensure that that is set for the advantage of the inter-sessional group which will meet in Hobart, Australia, in October-November.

The hon. Gentleman refers to research into blue whales and his fear of the Japanese. I shall keep an eye on the matter, but it is important that the Japanese were prepared to enter into the investigation. Until we think or know otherwise, I am prepared to go along with their intentions. I hope that we can encourage them. Certainly it would not be proper for such an investigation to start with a prejudgment on either side. We want to know the facts. That is what the investigation is about.

The international community has shown Norway that its largely unilateral approach is unacceptable. If Norway were to come into the European Community, it would have to accept the rules. I do not suggest that it cannot say or argue what it likes in advance, but it belongs to an international body that has banned commercial whaling, and it ought to meet its obligations. If Norway were to join the EC, it would be expected to meet its obligations within the Community.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman's opinions on the International Whaling Commission's role and the importance that goes beyond whales of dealing with the environment. That is why I get somewhat angry about the reaction of Norway. If a nation cannot accept the scientifically based decisions of an international organisation to which it belongs because they happen not to be in its interests, it is infuriating when that nation goes around the world telling other nations to obey other international institutions the demands of which those nations find onerous. There should be one standard that should be adhered to not only by Norway but by the rest of us.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom has been one of the leaders in the IWC, and of late the pressure groups in this country have led the movement to protect whales internationally? Will he therefore try his best to keep whales out of the other more spurious and doubtful campaigns in the way that he has stated today? Is he aware that our hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) was talking about whales in the Council of Europe last week at 15 to the dozen, as only he can?

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to agree with my hon. Friend that this is not a matter of party political division. I should like to recognise the work of my official Tony Burne and his officials not only at the meeting but in the many months that have gone before.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is a sterling supporter of the moratorium, and even if I were likely to slip from my view, he would soon see that I was ratcheted back to the position in which I ought to be.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): May I thank the Minister, the Government and Tony Burne and his colleagues, and welcome the success of the session of the IWC? May I add to the pressure on the Government to make their view clear to those who are threatening to go their own way?

Will the Minister reaffirm to the House that what Japan calls research, but which ends up as catching whales for food, and what Norway calls necessary hunting, even though it now appears that the majority of Norwegians questioned in opinion polls are against it, are unjustified?

Does the Minister further agree that the last couple of centuries have seen the loss of various species of whale completely, and that until it is shown scientifically that there are growing and sustainable stocks of all species of whale, no argument that allows commercial whaling to continue is acceptable to this community or to any other country that calls itself civilised?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the conservation elements in such decisions. It would be wrong of us to endanger any part of the whale population.

I am extremely suspicious of those who now tell us that there are enough minke whales to take, when the only reason that there are reasonable stocks of minke whales is because the other larger whales proved more profitable in the past. They sought to destroy those stocks and nearly succeeded, and are now suggesting that the minke whale has become essential, when it has been saved only by the fact that it was not big enough to attract depredations in the past. Of course conservation comes first, but I think that being able to insist on the rules comes a close second. I want to find a much more humane method of taking whales before I shall even discuss the possibility of resuming that activity.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept the argument that whales have human levels of intelligence, and therefore undergo extreme suffering when they are murdered by inhumane methods? Will he undertake to ensure that our Government will not support any resumption of the killing of whales unless a proper and humane method of killing is discovered, whatever the other arguments for killing? Is he prepared to help to seek to enforce a worldwide ban on the sale of whalemeat?

Mr. Gummer: We ban whale product sales in the European Community, which is a good way of taking the lead. I am aware that the problem for the whale is that, because it is thought of as a large fish, people fail to remember that it is a mammal, with a highly developed nervous system. I am not sure that I precisely agree with the human comparison that my hon. Friend used, but the whale is an advanced animal. Three criteria have to be met before we even discuss the resumption of commercial whaling, none of which has so far been met—all three have to be met before such a discussion can take place.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement. Will he acknowledge that right hon. and hon. Members receive considerable correspondence about the subject, not least from secondary and primary schools, where there is much horror at the vicious and uncivilised manner of killing? The dolphin population around the shores of Wales is diminishing and urgently needs protection. Has the right hon. Gentleman any details of how Iceland, Norway and Japan have been monitored by the Commission and Governments? I urge the right hon. Gentleman to go away, read Melville's "Moby Dick" and take note of the character, the monomaniac Captain Ahab. If he does so, the right hon. Gentleman may become even more concerned about the cause in which the nation wants him to succeed.

Mr. Gummer: I have been criticised for doing the opposite: for being too tough—and I do not accept that criticism. I think that any further reading about Captain Ahab may make me less able to remain quiet in the face of the comments of the hon. Member for Bolsover, so I shall do my best to act without a further reading of the book.

We must be careful not to extend the issue, so that we push everything else into insignificance. That is one reason why I believe that we should look into the management of all cetaceans, not just those which have so far been covered by the International Whaling Commission, which has full power to deal with other members of the whale family. It would be hard if some change of nomenclature resulted in our damaging the stocks of some of the smaller cetaceans—as is now happening. We must monitor the position more effectively, and we shall seek to do so.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I thank my right hon. Friend for all the work that he has done on the subject. I am particularly grateful that he has told the House of the considerable pressure on the smallest cetaceans that results from the barbarous activity. People on the south coast have been entertained by the dolphins that have taken up residence in the Solent recently. Their presence not only shows the improvement in water quality there, but that dolphins are clearly migrating from Wales.

Although we all appreciate that the southern sanctuary would be the best possible policy, would my right hon. Friend care to consider the questions that I have been asking the Foreign Office—proposing that we extend the 200-mile exclusion zone around the South Sandwich Islands, South Georgia and all our Antarctic property?

While we always strive for international agreement, in the short term would not 200-mile territorial limits be a quick answer to preserving some of these stocks?

Mr. Gummer: I shall get out my atlas and check on my hon. Friend's questions.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): While I welcome the Minister's statement, my constituents believe—I share their belief—that the phrase "the humane control of whales" is a contradiction in terms. Surely we should not encourage any method with claims to killing whales humanely, however long the scientific seal of good housekeeping might be. We should move further and more swiftly towards a permanent and total ban on all whaling.

What steps does the Minister contemplate the Government taking to bring pressure to bear on Norway, which has taken this unilateral decision, to make it acknowledge the commitments to which it has signed up, and to stop forthwith any whaling at all?

Mr. Gummer: I know that some people share the hon. Lady's views, but if we are to ask Norway to obey her commitments, we must also obey ours. The International Whaling Commission is clearly set up to manage whaling, not to abolish it. So much is quite clear in the international agreement. I therefore could not possibly demand of Norway that she adopt a responsibility that goes contrary to what we have all signed up to. That is why the United Kingdom has been quite clear about this.

We have readily taken on our international obligations. We insist on others carrying them through, but the hon. Lady does her cause harm by undermining the basis on which we have achieved and will extend this moratorium. Once we start saying that we do not approve of the IWC's basic constitution, it will be very difficult for us to keep Norway or Japan under control. I am much more interested in saving the whale than in advancing a particular view.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his great achievements at the conference will be undermined unless we can bring real pressure to bear on the countries that seek to ignore the rules of the club? Does he agree that, far from excluding Norway from the European Community, we could bring much more pressure to bear if we encouraged her to join it? One of the benefits of the Maastricht Bill is that it will bring greater enforceability of the rules of the European Community, including rules affecting conservation, of whales or sea fish. We should welcome Norway in, and then make sure that she obeys the rules or pays the price.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to say that no country can join the European Community without accepting the obligations that that entails. Until now, we have not been able to insist on that; the great advantage of Maastricht is that it makes such insistence possible. The sooner the House passes the Maastricht Bill and Britain returns to the centre of the Community, the better for my hon. Friend, for us and for the whales.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Government deserve congratulations on the outcome of the negotiations and on their far-sighted view of the consequential threat to other cetaceans. Does not the Secretary of State believe, however, that our position is undermined when Norway and Japan refer to us as "hypocrites" because we oppose the harvesting of whales for food while permitting the hunting of equally intelligent animals for sport? Would we not be in a far stronger position to show our compassion for all other species if we banned fox hunting in Britain?

Mr. Gummer: That is the first question today to undermine the position of the United Kingdom in international affairs. The argument for whales derives, first, from the fact that they are an international, not a national, resource. They are therefore clearly the responsibility of an international body.

Secondly, whales are threatened as a species, and that makes them wholly different from any of the animals to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Thirdly, there is no indication that, at least in present numbers, whales are so predatory that we have to cull them to protect other species. Again, that makes them entirely different from vermin and pests.

The hon. Gentleman should recognise those distinctions. I know that he feels strongly about the issue, but he does the cause of the protection of whales no good at all by confusing those distinctions. He can put his case, and I shall argue vehemently against him, because in my view hunting is one of the sensible ways to ensure that the balance of nature is maintained. We can have that argument, but he should not try to drive a wedge between us on whales when we are on the same side.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Will the Minister confirm that, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), he said that the Government do not envisage any measures against any country that unilaterally breaches the moratorium on whale hunting?

Mr. Gummer: No, I was answering the hon. Lady's main question, which was whether I was prepared to insist that the Norwegians had broken the IWC agreement because they were not opposed to whaling per se. The IWC is not opposed to whaling per se. It has a moratorium because it believes that the proper conditions for resuming whaling are not being met.

I have made it clear that we shall seek to bring all kinds of pressure on Norway and Japan to ensure that the rules are kept. So far, we have been successful in that. Norway has threatened to withdraw from the IWC, but has so far not done so. Iceland has withdrawn, but has not resumed commercial whaling. My job is to ensure the end rather than the means. I want to stop whales being hunted unless there are circumstances in which that becomes necessary.

I say not that there are no measures that we would fail to take, but that we shall take every measure that is open to us. So far we have been successful. I have today repeated my plea to the Norwegian Government to recognise that it is entirely inimical to their normal stance in international affairs to insist upon whaling when any other country that broke an international agreement of this sort would be attacked by the Norwegian Government right from the start.

Mr. Dennis Skinner: Is the Minister aware that, if Norway was daft enough to join the Common Market, it could decide to have an opt-out on whales anyway, as the Tory Government have done on the social chapter? If the British people are barmy enough to listen to this Minister and accept what he has to say, would it not be good for

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

them to reflect upon the fact that the Government promised protection for the British fishermen, many of whom are now out of work? They promised protection for the miners, the steel workers and the shipyard workers, but they are nearly all on the dole. If the whales could listen to me for a moment, I would say to them, "Don't believe a word this Government say."

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the House expected that question. It would be helpful to the House if it could be advertised when the hon. Gentleman proposes to put his maiden question that does not involve lowering the tone of debate to the level of party political abuse.

Mr Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Does the International Whaling Commission consider the effect of pollution and submarine development resources on the cetacean population? I am thinking especially of the dolphin population in Cardigan bay, whose survival may be endangered by the development of oil and gas resources. They may be driven from Cardigan bay to the south of England, and I should not like to see that happen.

Is there any liaison between the Minister's Department and the Department of Trade and Industry about the granting of licences? If there is, will he ensure that that Department undertakes a proper environmental impact assessment of Cardigan bay in advance of any further licensing for oil exploration there?

Mr. Gummer: For obvious reasons, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is involved in discussions on anything that might affect marine life. We carry out a great deal of research and are concerned to ensure that pollution and other factors do not cause the loss of stocks. The reasons for the reductions in stocks seem quite different, but we keep a close eye on the matter. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we do not wish to give as an excuse for the resumption of commercial whaling the claim that we merely have to do something else to the environment? I am keen to ensure that we stick by that first principle—the moratorium—and proceed from there. I shall keep a close eye on pollution.

Madam Speaker: We must now move on.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow) *rose——*

Madam Speaker: I know when the hon. Gentleman came into the House.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

RATEABLE VALUES

That the draft Alcan Aluminium UK Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Forth Ports plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 97(1) (Matters relating exclusively to Scotland),

That the Matter of Crime in Scotland, being a Matter relating exclusively to Scotland, be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

Sport

4.5 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): I beg to move

That this House congratulates Her Majesty's Government on its continuing recognition of sport's role in enhancing the nation's life and its prestige abroad.

It seems appropriate that we should be given the opportunity to debate sport this week and on this day; this week, the first of the one-day internationals between England and Australia heralds the arrival of summer, of a kind, and we also wish good luck to the British Lions touring team in New Zealand. This day is also appropriate, as I am sure that all hon. Members here want to congratulate Miss Rebecca Stephens on becoming the first British woman ever to reach the summit of Mount Everest. I understand that she comes from Fulham, and I cannot imagine a more excellent example of upward mobility than she has demonstrated today.

Some hon. Members—no doubt among the few who are not present—might feel that sport is not as serious a subject as many that we have debated at length during past weeks. Some hon. Members might say that it is a trivial topic, but I must tell them, and any here who may be tempted to say the same, that sport is a topic which concerns a huge number of our constituents; a topic which is perhaps more aired and discussed in the pubs and clubs than many of those that exercise our minds in the Chamber. It is appropriate that, once in a while, we should have the opportunity to discuss some of the issues which concern us and our constituents. I can see that I have already got some minds working. I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway).

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I was slightly sad to hear my hon. Friend use the word "trivial" in relation to sport, even to dismiss it. Does he accept that sport is fundamental to physical education, and that physical education is as important a part of a child's education as any other, in that it contributes to the positive physical development of the child and that has a bearing on the child's mental development?

Mr. Coombs: I have no quarrel with what my hon. Friend has said. I almost think that he had an opportunity to look at the text of my speech as it lay on the Bench between us, because I shall talk about that aspect of sport later. There is nothing trivial about the subject—only perhaps in the minds of some people who fail to appreciate its importance.

Before I go any further I shall quote for the benefit of the House one or two figures that illustrate the significant part that sport plays in this country. I am indebted to the Henley Centre for Forecasting, which produced a report for the Sports Council about three years ago showing that the value of sport in its broadest sense was £8·27 billion at 1990 prices, which was equivalent to 1·7 per cent. of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product for that year. That figure had seen some growth in the previous five years. In 1985, it was £5·58 billion, which is equivalent to 1·4 per cent. of GDP.

Another way to measure those figures is by the number of people employed in the sport-related economy. The Henley centre estimated that sport-related economic activity generated just over 467,000 jobs in 1990, which accounted for slightly more than 2 per cent. of employees in the United Kingdom. It does not include the large number of unpaid hours put in by the tens of thousands of voluntary workers who give their services—estimated at more than 70 million hours in 1990. Sport is a significant industry and significant part of the British economy.

Sport contributes to the health of the nation and is a constant source of national pride, whether it is for Stephen Hendry and Steve Davis in snooker, Nigel Mansell in motor racing, Linford Christie or Sally Gunnell in Olympic athletics. All of them are world or Olympic champions who bring glory to a country which, all too often, has a tendency to under value its achievements.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The hon. Gentleman began his speech with a reference to the one-day cricket game. I urge him to keep a keen eye on Glamorgan county cricket because Viv Richards—even at the age of 41—in partnership with Matthew Maynard, is going great guns and we should win something this year. I draw his attention also to the need, throughout Britain and certainly in Wales, for more all-weather pitches, with decent changing facilities, that are close to, or within, the large council estates. If we had more of those facilities throughout the nation, there might be less juvenile crime.

Mr. Coombs: I wish Messrs. Richards and Maynard success on all those occasions when they are not playing against my county of Hampshire, of which more anon. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman in his call for those facilities, which will enable cricket to flourish in Britain. Again, he has gone slightly ahead of my own comments on that matter, but if he stays with the debate long enough, he will hear what I have to say, and I hope that he will be pleased with it.

I hope that, in the debate, we can focus on some of the problems that sport faces today but not lose sight of our achievements. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage has it in his power to help British sport to fresh success in the future, but he cannot do everything. A complex network of organisations exists to ensure that sport is the prerogative of all of us, while those of real ability can be found, encouraged and trained to the level of international success. The pyramid of United Kingdom sport should have the broadest possible base and the highest possible apex, for all our sakes.

A number of the issues that I shall raise concern the funding and administration of sport, but I shall begin with the exciting prospect of the Olympic games coming to Britain. We are now firmly embarked on Manchester's bid for the Olympic games in the year 2000. Naturally, we all wish Bob Scott and his team every success in the campaign, which will culminate in Monte Carlo on 23 September. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given tremendous support to Manchester's bid, and his presence in Monte Carlo on that date, when the decision is to be taken, would be a great boost to the Olympic movement. It would significantly increase the chances of Manchester's bid being successful. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take that message to the Prime Minister and urge him to go to Monte Carlo in September.

I do not need to point out the importance of a successful bid by Manchester to the infrastructure of the north-west. As I see one or two Members from that region

[Mr. Coombs]

in the Chamber, I shall leave such comments to them. I hope that they will take up that point, because it seems to me to be of crucial importance.

It is also worth pointing out that home advantage in the Olympic games is of inestimable value. We have only to consider the success of Spain in Barcelona and of South Korea in Seoul. Last year, Spain increased its gold medals from one in Seoul to 13 on its home territory. Four years earlier, South Korea won 12 gold medals in Seoul and was in fourth place in the medals table. Those countries wanted success and were prepared to invest in it—not only in new stadiums, but in support of their athletes.

We must decide how much success we want and how many medals we want to win. We must then be prepared to resource the effort needed to reach that target. The Sports Council recently announced its grant aid to Olympic sports leading up to the Atlanta games in 1996. The cash increases gradually from £5·1 million to £5·7 million, but, allowing for inflation, the value of the grant reduces. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear that in mind when he discusses such matters with the Sports Council.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of the Manchester Olympics bid and its importance to Britain and the north-west, will he say whether he agrees that one of the most crucial advantages of Manchester winning the bid, as I am confident it will, will be the enormous boost to tourism in Britain in general, and in the north-west in particular? With the vast majority of hotel beds in the north-west being in my constituency of Blackpool, I have an obvious interest in the Manchester bid succeeding. I very much welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has spoken about that today.

Mr. Coombs: One of the nice things about a debate on sport is that we all agree with each other on almost everything. For the third time, I am happy to welcome an intervention that supports my view. My hon. Friend is well aware of my interest in tourism. I share his optimism that the north-west will benefit in that and in other respects from a successful bid by Manchester.

I want to discuss where resources from sport will come from in future. My hon. Friend the Minister recently told the House that the proceeds of the national lottery that go to sport should be used more for capital projects than for revenue support. I agree with that in principle, as we do not want the lottery to shore up the costs of a whole series of white elephants. However, a case can be made for the short-term investment of lottery proceeds in the training of Olympic competitors, especially through the Sports Aid Foundation, to enable our elite sports men and women to reach their full potential in Atlanta and, perhaps, in Manchester.

Sporting facilities needed for training are generally good, but athletes need time to train. That means resources for scholarships or a top up for part-time work. We could help with that if the lottery's proceeds could be suitably directed to the necessary support for success.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I agree with what my hon. Friend has said about the facilities for excellence. Does he agree that the base for sport depends on the very basic availability of land, especially playing fields? In the past, that has been threatened by local authorities that have sold playing fields. That practice must be stopped—*[Interruption.]* I was not seeking to be controversial, but now I shall be. That base for sport was also threatened by the former Greater London council and Inner London education authority, which consistently opposed any team sport. As a consequence, sport in London suffered and had to be rescued by organisations such as the London Community Cricket Association.

Mr. Coombs: I am beginning to think that if I give way again, nothing in my speech will sound original as I deliver it. I agree with my hon. Friend and I intend to refer to those matters in a few moments. However, I shall try not to repeat what he said in his excellent and helpful intervention.

Before I leave the subject of Olympic sports, I want to raise two specific points with my hon. Friend the Minister. The Government promised legislation to safeguard the British Olympic Association's use of the Olympic rings symbol for sponsorship and other purposes. Can my hon. Friend say when that legislation will be ready and when the House will have a chance to consider it, because it is of great importance in the lead-up to the next Olympic games in 1996?

Will my hon. Friend also listen to a special plea from the sport of ice skating? Mention of John Curry, Robin Cousins, Jayne Torville and Christopher Dean reminds us that we can compete at the highest level—but our facilities in that sport are so limited that our elite competitors must train in the middle of the night, when ice rinks are not used by casual, amateur skaters. Is my hon. Friend prepared to unfreeze the sources from the lottery to correct that situation? I appreciate that it will not be his decision, but I have no doubt that he has influence in that sphere, as in many others. I hope that he will exert it.

Ice skating is one sport which attracts enthusiastic beginners of all ages, some of whom go on to be champions. Another is swimming. We have enjoyed great success with swimming over the years. One thinks of Duncan Goodhew, Sharon Davies, and many others. However, too many children in this country never learn to swim and, appallingly, on average two children drown every week.

The efforts of the Royal Life Saving Society, the Amateur Swimming Association and the English School Sport Association have for several years been directed at a campaign for swimming in schools. In September, the Royal Life Saving Society will place definitive water safety and swimming resource materials in every school in the land. Young people must learn water safety skills in primary schools. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to endorse that campaign and to impress on the Department for Education the need to support swimming with national curriculum time and the necessary resources.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I accept that swimming education is necessary and should be encouraged. Can the hon. Gentleman say why facilities are being reduced so dramatically in inner-city areas such as my own, where local authorities have no funds to provide them?

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that I am speaking up today for sport. I am not here to defend a reduction in swimming facilities; in fact, I want to see them expanded. If the right hon.

Gentleman is fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that he will take up that point, which is crucial for the safety of our young people.

On 13 April, the Government published their own water sports safety review. They are aware of the issues, but I want them to be aware also that they should channel resources to ensure that water safety can be a reality for all our children in future years.

Swimming is one of the best forms of exercise. I know that many right hon. and hon. Members participate in it, yet the national picture in this country is unhappy and unhealthy. The latest national fitness survey estimated that 70 per cent. of men and 91 per cent. of women do not take sufficient exercise for a healthy life style. A recent study by Exeter university concluded that 13 per cent. of boys and 10 per cent. of girls were overweight while at school—partly through lack of exercise. Physical education is, of course, part of the national curriculum, but we need a commitment from the Department for Education to a minimum of two hours physical education a week if sufficient physical exercise is to be available to young people.

Resources and facilities are vital to physical education in schools, and no sport has been more seriously affected —at the level of popular participation—by a lack of resources, than cricket. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), who has now left the Chamber —mentioned cricket, and I wish to say a little about that fine sport.

The problem is not so much the selling off of playing fields as the fact that they were under-used and not properly maintained when they still existed. That, I fear, is part of the reason why they were sold off. According to a recent report by the National Cricket Association, 97 per cent. of those asked said that the lack of cricket in schools was the main reason why the game had lost much of its appeal and its following.

Gone are the days when tens of thousands flocked to county grounds on a Saturday to watch the first day of a championship match. Now, those who bother to go will see—if they are lucky—the third day of a four-day game, played on a flat, covered wicket, in which, all too often, the bat dominates the ball to an unacceptable degree. Cricket lovers are deeply concerned about England's lack of success in India and Sri Lanka; by the endless experiments with coloured clothing and white balls; and by the most curious selection policies that I can remember in my 40 years as a cricket lover.

Would it be asking too much for us to be allowed to watch David Gower coming out to bat for England against Australia at Lord's one month from today, preferably—if a Hampshire supporter may be permitted to say this—to join Robin Smith in a productive partnership of power and elegance?

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): May I help my hon. Friend to select the England side? This is relevant to both the debate and the Front Bench. Might it be an idea to adopt the Indian system whereby the selectors have two Government nominees with voting rights on the board? I would certain nominate my hon. Friend as one, and possibly the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) as the other. We might then have a more balanced side.

Mr. Coombs: The all-party cricket group, under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), is already beginning to influence the English selection process. It recently invited Mr. Ted Dexter to one of its meetings. I am not sure whether Mr. Dexter took away all our thoughts; we shall see when the team is chosen for the first test next month.

Let us be serious. Only if the game of cricket is enabled to flourish in our schools will we see its best aspects—the things that we all love—in future. I believe that time is running out for the recovery of the game we love.

I wish that time allowed me to do more than merely mention a range of other sports; I hope that other hon. Members will be able to say more about them. I should like to speak in more detail of our joy at Britain's having a world heavyweight boxing champion for the first time this century—I am sure that we all congratulate Lennox Lewis on his achievement. I wish that I could say more about the dominance of world golf by a British golfer, Nick Faldo; about the contribution of Widnes and Wigan to the game of rugby league in this country—following Saturday's game, perhaps we should mention St. Helens as well; and about the excellent family entertainment which speedway provides in my constituency and many others.

I should also like to refer to the Government's recent rescue of the British horseracing industry, in the nick of time. Perhaps at least one hon. Member will be tempted to speak of the problems of greyhound racing, and the question of evening off-track betting shop opening.

Let me address myself instead to the question of the administration of British sport and the resources available to it. In October this year, the new Sports Commission will begin its work, and the English Sports Council will come into existence to mirror those in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. To most people, that sounds a sensible arrangement, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that it should not, and must not, be allowed to be the reason for more bureaucracy and, hence, for the increased use of resources that would otherwise go directly into sport.

It worries me that, in a recent parliamentary answer, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage told the House that, whereas the Arts Council spends 3·6 per cent. of its grant in aid on administration, the Sports Council spends 37 per cent. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that in his reply.

I should not want the House to be misled by my reference to those facts. I am well aware of the wide range of excellent services to sport provided by the Sports Council. Nevertheless, we should concentrate on those administration costs for a moment, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to reassure us. Clearly, we do not need more bureaucracy in sport. We need resources directed at our sportsmen and sportswomen out of the £50 million that the Government give to the Sports Council every year.

By contrast, the new Foundation for Sport and the Arts spends only 2 per cent. of its budget on administration. The foundation has already disbursed more than £100 million in donations and, with the Football Trust, is making excellent use of the money released by the reduction in the pools betting duty that the Chancellor has initiated. The pools companies deserve our congratulations, too, on the way in which they have supported the foundation.

[Mr. Coombs]

It is clear that the private sector as a whole has a major role to play in the funding of sports projects. It is vital, therefore that the expertise of leisure industry companies such as First Leisure is used in the planning of commercially sound joint ventures. In that context, my hon. Friend the Minister may care to note the view of the leisure companies that compulsory competitive tendering, although it is a step in the right direction, is not delivering the level of investment for which we had all hoped.

Some 84 per cent. of contracts in local government are won in house. That may well mean sharper management in many cases, but it does not bring in the expertise of the private sector or the investment that is so badly needed to improve facilities owned by local authorities. The right hon. Member for Salford, East referred to swimming facilities, but there are many other instances in which more resources and investment are badly needed.

If the proceeds of the national lottery are to go to local authorities to any degree or if capital receipts are to be used for sports projects, I believe that private sector expertise will be needed to ensure that those funds are used for the benefit of council tax payers, and not at open-ended cost to them.

I mentioned the Football Trust, and I want to conclude with a look at the state of our premier spectator sport. There is much to celebrate—not least England's superb effort in the world cup, not only in reaching the semi-finals but in winning the fair play award. Thanks in large part to the legislation introduced by the Government to control the consumption of alcohol, crowd behaviour has improved so significantly that the pitch invasion at Manchester City on 7 March stands out as an unusual occurrence, and the tragedies of Hillsborough and Heysel seem a very long time ago.

The recommendation of the Taylor report that football stadiums should provide only seating accommodation has been modified in respect of the two lower divisions, some of whose clubs would probably have been bankrupted by that requirement. But that threat still hangs over some first division clubs whose average attendances are lower than the best of those in the second division. On 3 May, Burnley and Rotherham, in the second division, had larger gates than Brentford, Charlton and Oxford in the first. Is my hon. Friend prepared to think again about the possibility of keeping some standing accommodation for clubs with average attendances over the season below 10,000—provided, of course, that the Football Licensing Authority considers that a club can meet safety requirements in respect of that standing accommodation?

My own club, Swindon Town, would very much like to keep its Stratton bank stand as standing accommodation even though it is now competing for a place in the Premier League. Without it, the ground's capacity would be reduced in 1994 from 19,000 to 14,000, even though the Football Trust has put up 60 per cent. of the cost of a new south stand.

There are many fans who still prefer to stand and who, I believe, can be trusted today to behave themselves. Yesterday's play-off game at Swindon against Tranmere Rovers was watched, without incident, by a crowd of 14,000, of whom 4,000 were standing. I hope that my hon. Friend will also be my flexible friend in this matter and give careful consideration to a further change in the regulations to ensure that those who wish to stand at football matches can, within reason, be allowed to do so.

In the meantime, the ability of many clubs to improve their grounds depends on the ability of the Football Trust to support them. Will my hon. Friend set minds at rest and reaffirm the extension of the reduction of 2·5 per cent. of pools betting duty on which the Football Trust is obviously entirely dependent?

The passage of the National Lottery etc. Bill led to some welcome amendments, designed to ensure that the pools companies were less adversely affected than they had feared. I thank my hon. Friend for the understanding that he has shown in such matters. Perhaps he will say whether he is now prepared to consider further the possibility of allowing the pools companies equal rights to advertise on television and radio as will be afforded to the national lottery? He will appreciate that there is a risk that the Football Trust and football clubs could be the losers if the playing field is not level.

The motion congratulates the Government on "its continuing recognition" of the role of sport. I should mention in particular the £3 million a year grant to Sportsmatch, the business sponsorship incentive scheme for sport, which is evidence of the Government's commitment to sport, as is the securing of international competitions such as the world gymnasium championships last month and the European football championships, which will come to England in 1996.

I believe, and I hope that the House believes, that we have very much to be proud of in British sport, but there is still very much to achieve in order to enhance the nation's life and its prestige abroad.

4.37 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on breaking new ground by tabling a motion on sport. It is generally Labour Members who initiate such debates, and it is good to see that tradition being broken. In addition to the congratulations—with which I concur—that the hon. Gentleman passed on to individual athletes, the British Lions and many more, I was surprised that he did not congratulate his own team, Swindon Town, on winning in the play-offs yesterday. I am sure that he would wish to rectify that omission.

It is thanks to the hon. Gentleman that I am once again at the Dispatch Box and able to lock horns with the Minister to discuss the general state of sport in Britain. I cannot, however, congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his wording of the motion. He clearly has a lot to learn about the state of sport in this country, and I suspect that the wording for the motion came from the Minister's own Department.

Before discussing that motion in detail, I am sure that the House will realise the importance that a successful national lottery could have for sport, and we all look to the Minister to ensure that sport gets a fair and honest deal. I must refer, however, to the pathetic charade that those of us concerned with the lottery have had to endure with the secrecy surrounding the GAH group report, which the Minister commissioned to assist the Government's thinking before the National Lottery etc. Bill was drafted. The Minister is aware of last week's scandalous revelation that the GAH group is now demanding £695 plus value

added tax for its own commercial report on the lottery —a report which any reasonable person would suspect is largely the product of work carried out at the taxpayer's expense. I received a letter from the Minister this morning informing me that in his view the GAH group commercial report

"bears no direct relation to the work we commissioned."

I am sure that the Minister was extremely careful in the choice of his words as he will have had the opportunity, as I have, to read a copy of the commercial report and to compare it with the terms of reference for the Government report given by his Department to the GAH group, which he set out in a parliamentary answer to me on 21 January.

I shall not dwell on the report today, but I shall be writing to the Minister in great detail to show him where I think that his assessment of the situation is wrong. However, he may wish to reflect on one aspect in advance of receiving my letter. Without using information gained as a result of its publicly funded work behind the scenes with his Department, how could the GAH group possibly produce a report providing information on the following: the criteria to be used to select the lottery contractor, the value of the contracts, the number of retailers and the work required in the preparation of the tender document?

There is one matter on which the Minister must put the House's mind at rest today. Has he made inquiries to ensure that the commercial report is the full extent to which the GAH group is seeking to profit from its access to privileged information and that the company is not working for any companies seeking to gain contracts for the lottery? I hope that the Minister will refer to that when he makes his contribution to the debate.

Before we leave the subject of the national lottery, the Minister will recall an interesting debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) about certain discriminatory practices exercised by the Rugby Football Union against the British Amateur Rugby League Association. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am sure that he and other hon. Members will wish to use this opportunity to pursue that vital issue. Perhaps the Minister will be able to give a more forthright reply than he was able to on Report.

We are discussing not only the national lottery, but the glut of issues and challenges facing the Minister and his as yet fledgling Department in relation to sport. He will know by now that sport has had enough of being treated as a political outcast by Tory Governments and is demanding the respect that it undoubtedly deserves. Perhaps I am being unkind to the Minister, because he is without doubt an improvement on his predecessor, the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins).

However, I must inform the Minister that, if he wishes to make his mark in sport, he must get to grips with the mandarins and with his own civil servants who seem incapable of tackling the needs of sport in this country. The Minister must by now be aware that, if sport is to prosper, he must do everything in his power to prevent his Department becoming a mere conduit through which vital aspects of policy are passed to other Departments. If he will allow me, I shall give an illustration of the damage that can ensue when he fails to give a lead to the Government on sport. He must bang some ministerial heads together to get results for our sportsmen and women and for spectators.

The Minister will be aware that one of the very few concrete actions to come from the review of sports policy undertaken by his predecessor was the publication for consultation of a draft letter—not an actual letter—about school playing fields, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Swindon. The Minister's predecessor sent the draft letter for comment from local authority organisations on 19 December 1991—17 months ago.

In a parliamentary written answer to me only four days ago, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), informed me that within 61 days responses had been received from all but one organisation—the Tory-dominated London Boroughs Association. Much to the Minister's embarrassment, I am sure, his hon. Friend went on to tell me that the LBA was sent a further copy of the letter and then had to be chased on the telephone before it informed the Government that it was not bothering to reply.

The Minister might like to comment on the commitment to sport in the capital of his political friends in the Tory-dominated LBA or, more to the point, their lack of commitment, which knocks the argument put forward by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis).

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I thought that the proof of the pudding was in the eating. If the hon. Gentleman were to come to the London borough of Wandsworth, he would see the "Sport for Youth" campaign which was initiated last year and which has been run by Wandsworth council. Its aim is to put back into the curriculum the sporting opportunities for young people which were woefully absent when the Inner London education authority was responsible.

Mr. Pendry: I regret giving way to the hon. Gentleman, who is merely plugging a particular borough and not the London Boroughs Association, to which I was referring.

Since the responses to the draft letter were received by the Department for Education more than 14 months ago, the Government have done nothing but sit on their hands. If the Minister is to have any credibility in sport, he must take this opportunity to apologise for the shameful lack of effort by his predecessor and promise the House that firm and decisive action will be taken without delay to halt the scandalous sale of those precious sporting assets—our school playing fields—to which the hon. Member for Swindon referred. I, and the House, look forward to that promise.

I must assure the Minister that his honeymoon period is well and truly over. We gave him an extended honeymoon, but it is now time he tackled the lack of concerted action and the unfulfilled promises which remain the hallmark of the Government's attitude to sport. For instance, I am sure that he will agree that it is high time he took a more positive approach to the problems facing our national game of football—a matter also mentioned by the hon. Member for Swindon.

My views on soccer are pretty well documented and, to be fair, I must acknowledge the positive attitude to football displayed by the Minister's previous boss, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor). Unfortunately, since the right hon. and learned Member left his post, football has seen precious little action from

[Mr. Pendry]

the Minister's Department or any other Department. Indeed, there has been a distinct lack of leadership exercised by the Minister towards out national game.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), who is the chairman of the all-party football committee, has asked me to apologise for his not being here, as Sheffield Wednesday is reorganising the ticket allocation for the replay on Thursday. My right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) is not only chairman of the all-party cricket committee but happens also to be vice-chairman of the all-party football committee—a versatile man—and he will no doubt try to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

If evidence of the lack of leadership is required, I mention the deafening silence from Ministers following the recent pitch invasions on grounds throughout the country —most recently at Exeter City, where the referee was assaulted. The pitch invasion at Manchester City last March was especially significant because nearly two thirds of the fans came from the £7 million new stand which was built in response to Lord Justice Taylor's recommendation for all-seater stadiums.

I do not for one minute wish to imply that such incidents reflect badly on the recommendations of the Taylor report or that we should discourage the construction of new modern stands fit for the 21st century —far from it: I want to see more of them—but the Minister will be aware that an integral part of the strategy for football which Taylor envisaged was to balance the greater freedom afforded by the removal of fences from in front of the stands with the creation of new offences to deter those who might wish to abuse that freedom and invade the pitch.

The Minister will be further aware that, following the publication of the Taylor report, I repeatedly urged the Home Secretary to heed Lord Justice Taylor's advice and get the new offences on to the statute book. That was done, albeit belatedly, with the introduction of the Football (Offences) Act 1991. What is the use of getting those offences on to the statute book if the powers thereby given to the clubs, to the police and to magistrates are not used to the full to discourage pitch invasions? Had a mere handful of the original offenders been charged under the Act, fined up to £1,000, excluded from the team's ground and had their names published in every team's programme in the early part of the season, we would not have found too many so-called fans running on to the pitch.

The Minister must see that as lack of action on his part and tell the House today that he will speak to his colleagues in the Home Office to get them to agree to issue a circular to magistrates and the police drawing attention to the provisions of the Act and pressing them to enforce it so as to prevent any recurrence of such disturbing events next season.

As the Minister is no doubt aware, the Football (Offences) Act 1991 arose out of a recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee report, "Policing Football Hooliganism", which was published in February 1991. He must also recall that the throwing of missiles and the chanting of obscene and racist language was also outlawed in the Act. Can he tell the House how well he has monitored progress in that area?

The Select Committee report also recommended, in line with the Taylor report, that it should be made a specific offence to sell tickets on the day of a football match without the authority of the home club. Yet the Government saw fit to leave such a provision out of the Football (Offences) Act. Since then, I have written repeatedly to Ministers urging them to introduce legislation against ticket touts and I have had two undertakings from the Prime Minister that legislation to prohibit ticket touting will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

I know that the Football Association shares my concerns and it is a disgrace that, more than three years later, nothing has been done by the Government. It is vital that legislation he introduced as soon as possible because of the mounting evidence of the problems caused by touting, both throughout the domestic calendar and at prestigious events such as the FA cup final. If the Minister saw *The Mail on Sunday* yesterday, he will have read Simon Greenberg's article highlighting some of the touting problems at Wembley over the weekend.

I hope that the Minister has had a chance to read the fine report by the chief trading standards officer of Liverpool city council which shows that touting has undermined segregation arrangements between supporters at every cup final between 1988 and 1992. It was estimated that, in the 1992 cup final between Liverpool and Sunderland, a minimum of 1,200 tickets were touted, resulting in fans paying up to £138,000 in excess prices. According to the report, the level of touting was in reality much higher. Many fans were understandably reluctant to reveal how much they had paid and where they purchased their tickets.

It is not just football that has fallen victim to the universally condemned action of ticket touts. In September 1990, the authorities at Wimbledon, tired of Government inactivity, took action and introduced measures designed to safeguard the position of tennis-loving fans and to minimise the black market in Wimbledon tickets.

The problem was of sufficient concern for my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) to raise the matter last week and to ask whether the Government would consider the possibility of touting spreading to Buckingham palace, now that the decision had been taken to issue tickets in advance for the newly announced tours of the palace. The spectacle of ticket-touting spivs at the royal palace may make the Government sit up. I hope that the Minister will raise the issue with Home Office Ministers, and that they will introduce an appropriate clause, perhaps in the Criminal Justice Bill which is about to begin its Committee stage, or that he will at least support others who may wish to introduce such a clause.

The Minister's previous boss, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney, received a delegation that I took to him on the question of standing areas at football grounds —a matter touched on by his hon. Friends. I put to the then Minister the desire of football supporters organisations for safe standing areas within their grounds and, having listened to the arguments, he conceded the case for the lower divisions, but he would not go all the way with us. Some premier and first division clubs will not meet the deadline laid down for conversion of their grounds to all-seater stadiums by 1994-95 for a host of reasons—some

have planning problems with their local authorities or with the Department of the Environment—so the present Minister will need to show some flexibility.

What has also happened since the Taylor report is that the world has moved on, especially in terms of science, and even since we met the Minister's right hon. and learned Friend there have been some significant advances in safety technology as it relates to the question of standing areas at grounds. The crowd pressure monitoring system introduced by the NNC at Risley is one such example of a proven system which can be adapted to crush barriers on terracing to prevent any threat to the safety of supporters who choose to stand.

The system contains a series of sensors in a barrier which are linked to a computer which monitors the amount of pressure being exerted on the barrier at the front of the crowd. The system has been so successful that it has attracted considerable interest from Italian stadium designers and from crowd safety consultants in the United States of America. It is another example of a British invention being taken up by others but not by the British themselves.

It is clear that that system, in conjunction with the Football Stadia Advisory Design Council's guidelines on safer terracing published in March, can clearly meet the highest safety standards that the Government rightly demand. In the interests of football, will the Minister give an undertaking to look at those proposals and to reconsider the whole question of safe terracing for those clubs which are expected to meet the deadlines of the Taylor report? Better still, will he also undertake to visit Risley to see for himself—as I have done—a system which, if adopted, will please millions of football supporters?

I hope that the Minister has had the chance to read a new report produced this week by the Sports Council, "New Horizons, Sport in the 90s", which sets out an agenda for its remaining period of office. The report says clearly on page 59 that Britain is lagging behind its European partners in terms of investment in new sporting development. The Sports Council in its comparison of final Government expenditure on sport, based on the 1985 prices, with the various member states of the Council of Europe, found that with the exception of Portugal, the United Kingdom Government spent one third less on sport than other member states did.

That led the Sports Council to conclude:

"Other nations have been swifter to recognise the economic benefits of sporting success, as well as its value to national prestige. They have invested heavily in new sporting developments. Overseas competitors are often surprised how relatively little financial support their sport receives in the land of its birth and how well Britain's sporting men and women perform despite this disadvantage. Other nations in Europe recognise the economic benefits of sporting success as well as its value to national prestige—indeed our overseas competitors are often surprised at how little financial support sport receives in this country".

That is why I disagree with the wording of the motion. If the hon. Member for Swindon had read that report, he might have framed the motion rather differently. I hope that the Minister will address himself to the Sports Council's comments.

The Minister's Department stands condemned as it has failed to put into practice one of the few important recommendations to come out of the review by the hon. Member for South Ribble—the proposal to reform the national structures of sport, including the creation of the United Kingdom Sports Commission and a separate English Sports Council. The Minister will understand our desire to press for further information about the exact date at which these bodies will be established as there is widespread concern that the Government's current plans will not come to fruition by October, as previously announced.

The Minister must recognise the concerns of those who are worried about the way in which the proposals for the United Kingdom Sports Commission are turning out. The Minister must be aware that a royal charter is not the property of Government, although once it is born, it can be revoked only by Parliament. It is not a political charter and, according to my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Howell, who knows about these things, it should not be imposed on Parliament or the sporting world in controversial circumstances, as it involves Her Majesty the Queen.

Opposition parties should already have been consulted, and as Opposition spokesman for sport I have yet to receive my official copy. Not only will the Minister offend Opposition parties, but he will offend his right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland unless fuller consultation is carried out.

The bureaucratic nature of the proposals is exactly as predicted by Lord Howell when he spoke from the Opposition Front Bench at the time of the initial announcement. Because the draft charters contradict much of what the review recommended, notably the breakdown of roles between the proposed United Kingdom Sports Commission and the Sports Council for England——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Robert Key): How does the hon. Gentleman know that?

Mr. Pendry: Because a charter has been leaked to me. However, it is a disgrace that I have not received a copy from the Minister.

The Minister will be aware that the hon. Member for South Ribble said in his review that the United Kingdom Sports Commission should be responsible for

"promoting higher standards of performance and excellence in sport at a UK level."

However, the wording in the draft charter is not "at a UK level", but for the "UK as a whole." That could lead to the interpretation that the UKSC has a responsibility for all aspects of sport in the United Kingdom causing no end of duplication and confusion between the proposed two organisations.

In short, the UKSC should be concerned with our international dimensions and the Sports Council with our national sports. The situation as it stands cannot be allowed to continue and I look forward to playing my part in the review process when the Minister has the courtesy to send me a copy of the charter.

An integral part of ensuring the success of the United Kingdom Sports Commission and the English Sports Council, whatever arrangements are arrived at for their eventual memberships and modus operandi, is securing a decent level of resources to back their efforts. In that respect, the hon. Member for Swindon has got it all wrong. We would expect the total amount given as grant aid to be more than the level of grant aid presently given to the Sports Council for Great Britain which, expressed in 1993-94 prices, has declined from £51 million in 1991 to

[Mr. Pendry]

£49·9 million in 1991-92. Judging from the Chancellor's autumn statement, the Government do not intend to honour their pre-election promise to maintain their funding for sports and the arts.

I have received a number of complaints from leisure departments of councils throughout the country about the current capping of their budgets, which has resulted in severe restraints on their capital programmes for sport. Figures from 1992 Sports Council survey of actual budgets and past expenditure clearly show that capital expenditure by district and borough in 1992-93 has fallen to 44 per cent. of the 1989-90 level. Those figures represent a disgraceful picture, and they should be dramatically improved.

We also want the Minister to clarify his commitment given during the Committee stage of the National Lottery etc. Bill and guarantee not just the funding of capital projects for sport, to which reference has been made, but also the revenue expenditure necessary for those projects to operate effectively. The Minister must be more positive about revenue spend as it goes hand in hand with capital projects.

Already up and down the country, as a result of Government policy, we see sport being denied to thousands of people because of the lack of funding. Indeed, the situation would be much worse if local authorities had not exercised considerable ingenuity in finding ways of keeping facilities open. However, some of the means employed to do that have the effect of restricting access through reductions in opening hours, reducing quality of service or increasing prices.

I will give the Minister some graphic illustrations of that. Manchester city council, the Olympic city, has closed Victoria baths in Hathersage road. The London borough of Greenwich is in the process of transferring its leisure facilities to workers' co-operatives or trusts. Langbaurgh-on-Tees has reduced opening hours and transferred full-time jobs to casual staff. The London borough of Haringey has reduced opening hours and there have been reductions in access to its dual use centres. Dudley metropolitan borough council has had to close a demonstration project called "The Fitness Factor" which it was running in co-operation with the Sports Council.

There are many more examples, in Peterborough, Basildon, Brentwood, Braintree and Castle Point. This has nothing to do with Government action in relation to local authorities which is forcing those sports facilities to become if not white elephants, then at least part-time working facilities.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The hon. Gentleman may not be aware that only two years ago I was a councillor in Hammersmith and Fulham. We had exactly the same problem of a shortage of funds and an inability to keep the swimming pools open. I went to see the pools and I spoke to the staff, who were very pleasant. They explained that the pools could not be opened, purely because of the inefficiency of the local administration, and that it had nothing to do with the amount of funding provided.

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Gentleman could not have listened to his hon. Friend the Member for Swindon, who referred to local authorities which had won the in-house tendering for those facilities. The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) has clearly got it all wrong.

Not only does the lack of funding prevent the necessary refurbishment of aging, worn-out buildings and facilities; it also means that preventive maintenance is skimped. As a result, we are storing up grave problems for the future. Perhaps the Minister can give local authorities and others the assurances that they seek in that important area.

I referred a little while ago to Manchester as the Olympic city, and we all hope that that will be the case in the year 2000. Perhaps the Minister will comment on reports—a point to which the hon. Member for Swindon referred—that in a recent speech to Manchester businessmen the Prime Minister withdrew a vital paragraph from his proposed text in which he was going to give his clear commitment to attending this autumn's Olympic committee meeting in Monte Carlo to lead Britain's efforts.

The Minister must give some reassurance today about that because there are those—including, perhaps, the hon. Member for Swindon—who believe that the Prime Minister withdrew that commitment because he has realised too late that he cannot honour the spending promises that he made towards the Olympic bid and is desperately trying to get away from those commitments.

Mr. Key *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Pendry: If that is not the case, the Minister can tell us today, but that is the view widely held in the sporting world.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No, I will not.

If the Minister moved in the circles of the sporting world, he might be aware of that view. He can end that worry once and for all by telling the House that the Government's financial commitment to the games will be honoured in full from existing spending programmes and without recourse to a raid on the millennium fund, which would fall foul of the additionality pledges made by the Secretary of State on Second Reading of the National Lottery etc. Bill.

I have given the Minister a shopping list of tasks on which I believe he should be taking action, and I do not wish to overburden him, but there is one area in which I believe he is duty bound to notch up a victory. I refer to one of the country's most popular participatory sports —angling.

The Minister may not be aware that the Foundation for Sports and the Arts, established in the 1991 Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has refused to give a single penny to angling and has constantly chopped and changed its reason for that. On 13 January, the secretary of the foundation, Mr. Grattan Endicott, wrote to Ken Ball, the president of the National Federation of Anglers, telling him that the foundation would not give money to angling because the trustees' policy is

"not to grant-aid activities that directly inflict pain or harm on members of the animal world."

Once the NFA had written to the foundation conclusively demonstrating that angling does no such thing, the foundation accepted those arguments. However, in a further letter on 24 February, the foundation came up

with the astonishing comment that, even though the impending revision of the trust deed might indeed render angling eligible for funding,

"the president of the Board of Trustees would not contemplate giving support to angling even if it were allowable."

The Minister must agree that the antipathy that that comment shows towards Britain's millions of anglers is staggering. Perhaps that is why, in a third letter on 5 April, the foundation attempted to back-track and came up with yet another excuse for denying angling any aid. It said: "angling is not athletic and funds would not stretch to such grants."

Surely the Minister will agree that it is deeply regrettable that out of an annual budget of £60 million the foundation feels that it cannot find a single penny for one of the country's most popular sports. As the Minister is the custodian of sport—and of that sport—in this House, he must do something about that. He must show today that he has the stomach to fight on behalf of the millions of anglers who look to him for a lead.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pendry: No, I am about to finish and many hon. Members wish to participate in this debate.

I hope that the Minister will write to the foundation and ask it to reconsider its decision to deny angling access to the funds made available for all sport by the Chancellor. Furthermore, will he agree to accept a delegation from me and the National Federation of Anglers?

Mr. Key: Not another one!

Mr. Pendry: It is true that I keep the Minister working. It is time that he recognised that he will receive a lot more requests for meetings. Obviously, there are many other issues that must wait for another occasion. I have no doubt that other Labour Members will raise issues to which I would dearly love to refer, but time does not permit me to do so.

I conclude by congratulating the hon. Member for Swindon. The terms of his motion did not reflect the content of his speech, which was far more relevant to this debate on sport than the words of the motion. What are words, after all? The main thing is that he gave a good speech. The Minister should reply not only to the points that I have made and to those of the hon. Member for Swindon, but to the other points that will be made as the debate proceeds.

5.10 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on bringing this important subject to the attention of the House. I express some regret that inevitably the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), as is his custom in such debates, gave us his usual whinge and whine that the only thing that would put sport right in the United Kingdom was funding and money. I wonder when the hon. Gentleman will understand that the sports men and women in the United Kingdom are capable of enjoying their sports to a certain extent to their own ability. Indeed, the last thing that they want is recourse to national or, indeed, local government funds.

There are many excellent organisations throughout the United Kingdom which the hon. Gentleman inevitably forgot to mention as he went down his cascading road of worrying about the Government and the extent of their involvement. It is ironic that the Government should be blamed for pitch invasions during the coming season, when I recall that some years ago pitch invasions were a scourge of football in the United Kingdom. Every opportunity that was given to the hon. Gentleman to jump up and oppose various legislation introduced by the Government in the ensuing argument was remarkable. He spent many a long hour castigating the Government on the various measures, both in the Committee Rooms and on the Floor of the House.

However, we have got used to the hon. Gentleman's attitude. All I can say is that, obviously, his tenure on the Front Bench will not be as long as that of his noble predecessor.

Mr. Pendry: Can the hon. Gentleman give me one or possibly two examples of what he means?

Mr. Carlisle: Of course. The hon. Gentleman did not agree with some aspects of the Football Spectators Bill —he kept us in Committee for many a long hour. I think that the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) was also on that Committee. Time and again, when the Government were wrestling with an enormous problem at that time, we had little co-operation from Labour Members, especially the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde.

It is nice to see my hon. Friend the Minister back here after his weekend sortie to Cannes for the film festival. We were disappointed that he did not—this is no aspersion on those in the Public Gallery—bring back any of the bimbos who were apparently trying to avoid him. Perhaps his speech will enlighten us as to what sport he found at the film festival. He has been a sterling champion of sport in the short time that he has been in that office, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. We look forward to the Minister's contribution this afternoon.

I was perhaps a teeny bit disappointed that my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon did not mention that sporting organisation which held its annual general meeting last week—the Central Council of Physical Recreation. The president of that council is his Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, who perhaps should be mentioned more often in the House. My hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a speech at the end of the annual general meeting. I was pleased to hear him say that lines of communication with that excellent organisation were being not simply reopened but endorsed by Her Majesty's Government and the Department of National Heritage.

That must be welcomed, because there is a history of spats, including legal spats, between the Sports Council, which has been very much a Government-funded organisation, and the CCPR. It is good to see the olive branch being extended by my right hon. Friend, and I hope that that will continue.

Most hon. Members, especially Labour Members—I must give a bouquet to the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, who has been a great champion of the CCPR —must understand the breadth of that organisation. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon talked about the broadest base of sport and the number of many and varied organisations which are either within the membership of the CCPR or which take an active part in its affairs—for example, the Organisation for British Blind Sport, the

[Mr. Carlisle]

Church Lads and Church Girls Brigade and the Spastics Society, as well as the British Darts Organisation, the Clay Pigeon Shooting Organisation and the National Rounders Association.

The voices of a broad band of organisations are often not heard, because they are not attractive for sponsorship, television coverage, or perhaps political activity. That is why I should like to pay tribute to those organisations for the work they do in representing all those minor sports.

Mr. Brandreth: I simply endorse the tribute that my hon. Friend is paying to the Central Council of Physical Recreation, which encompasses the whole breadth of sport and recreation. I also underline his point about the new sense of co-operation between the CCPR and the Sports Council. That co-operation was recently exemplified by their playing pitch strategy. In the past, they produced documents which may have been in conflict: they are now producing strategies in partnership for the good of sport throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Carlisle: The House should listen to the authority that my hon. Friend brings to this subject. I pay tribute to him for the work that he has done for the Playing Fields Association. Indeed, that aspect of the CCPR's work must be applauded—reference has already been made to it. The campaign for saving our playing fields, which received support from hon. Members on both sides of the House—contrary to what the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said—attracted enormous concern and some sympathy. The loss of playing fields is one of the various cudgels on which the CCPR has advised hon. Members in the past few years. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) is right to say that, if we are moving down the road of more co-operation, it must be good.

Another subject in which the CCPR is involved—my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon referred to this—is the basis of rating. I know that there will always be an argument as to whether local authorities should have the opportunity to grant some 75 per cent. relief. Credit must be given to the Government for giving local authorities that opportunity. It is partly due to the CCPR that the rating system has been examined.

There was some disappointment with the review of my hon. Friend the Minister's predecessor—it is known as the Atkins review—because the CCPR got only a passing mention at the end of the report. As we look with perhaps some uncertainty, which is expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, to the formation of the United Kingdom Sports Commission, one hopes that the CCPR will play a fuller part, in co-operation with the commission.

Inevitably, debates of this nature tend to focus on the funding of sport. It would be somewhat churlish if that were avoided, having expressed the sentiments that I did at the beginning of my speech. The question will always be whether money is available and, indeed, where that money will come from. I have always believed, as do many Conservative Members, that much of the funding for sport must come from within the sport itself. It must be said that some of the major sports, especially rugby union and tennis, are high earners in their own right.

It is true to say that rugby union is a net contributor to the Treasury, rather than a net taker. One must take one's hat off to the Rugby Union and, indeed, to the Scottish Rugby Union and the Welsh Rugby Union, because they have stood on their own feet—they have had recourse to public funds only in a minor way. They have got their house in order, and their sport is popular. Contrary to popular opinion, it is still an amateur sport—*[Laughter.]* I thought that I would get that reaction from Labour Members. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) should contain himself for a moment.

I would be the first to express some concern, even after the excellent speech by Mr. Dudley Wood to the all-party rugby league committee the other day, that rugby union must watch for the professionalism that is creeping in. It is not for me to get into an argument with the rugby union. Certainly, the matter may be raised later.

However, I must say to the Rugby Union that many of us who represent some of the junior clubs and, indeed, some of the junior so-called first-class clubs, are becoming increasingly worried that those in the top division are beginning to attract players by means which might be considered to be professional. It is true that such players are a tiny minority and that the practice does not filter down all the way to the junior clubs, as it does in association football. In football, even village sides pay professionals to play for them. However, some warning must be given to rugby union, not from the House but from fellow rugby union players. It must be told that many people are concerned about the way things are going. One hopes that rugby union will address those difficulties.

One regrets the passing of the true amateur. This year, the All England tennis club will provide £303,000 as the first prize for the men's singles winner. That is an enormous amount of money in anyone's book for the winner of the prestigious Wimbledon championship. It is certainly the championship of the world. The reasons given are that other countries offer similar prizes and that the exchange rate has fallen. It is not for me to criticise the Chancellor of the Exchequer in this debate. Lower exchange rates inevitably mean that the prize money must increase.

One must ask whether it is right that £303,000 should go to one player when tennis, especially for junior and school players, is crying out for funds. I should like to see some of the highly paid professional sportsmen who give us such enormous entertainment give something back. They obviously give something back in the form of taxation, but I should like to see them participate actively in training and coaching youngsters as they approach the end of their careers.

I welcome the formation of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the excellent work of Tim Rice and his team. Cash is now coming back to worthy causes. The other day, some money was made available for a girls' rugby union centre in my constituency. I cannot say that I find it a pleasing sight to see women playing rugby.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Why?

Mr. Carlisle: It is just a male prejudice.

The girls are enthusiastic, and they have been encouraged. Money has been made available to them by the Foundation for Sports and the Arts, which is another initiative taken by the Government in consultation with the CCPR and others. Again, that is to be welcomed.

I also welcome the formation of the Football Trust, which puts money back into the game from the pools. Like Opposition Members, I welcome the Government's change of heart on the pools and the national lottery. I am delighted that there will now be a much more level playing field for the pools and the lottery. For example, the pools will now be able to enjoy roll-over prizes and so on.

The national lottery will obviously dominate the sports debate in the next few years. It is perhaps regrettable that, although funds were originally to be allocated in thirds, we have added another two categories—charities and the millennium fund. That will inevitably reduce the amount of money that goes to sport.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's estimate of some £150 million in the first year of the national lottery will be a serious underestimate. I believe that the national lottery will catch the imagination of the public. In that soft form of gambling, people will feel in their hearts that they are supporting sport. I hope that, as the take increases, funds from the national lottery will replace the money given by the taxpayer. I am aware that the Government do not necessarily agree with that.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde spoke about continental stadiums and so on. It would be nice if we could enjoy such facilities, but they should not necessarily all be provided at the taxpayer's expense. I hope that the national lottery will begin to yield enough money to enable us to take sport out of the political argument for local authorities and national Government.

Other funding has inevitably come from sponsorship. I give credit to the CCPR for forming the Institute of Sports Sponsorship under the Presidency of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh. I also give credit to the Government for going ahead with the Sportsmatch scheme, which arose directly out of the institute. The pound-for-pound basis must be the way forward. We hope that the £3 million earmarked at this stage will be increased as the scheme becomes more popular. I give credit to my hon. Friend the Minister for setting up that institution.

I also give credit to the Institute of Professional Sport, which helps professional sportsmen who have fallen on hard times for various reasons—often as a result of injury. Mr. Garth Crooks and others are doing excellent work to help those who can very easily become the forgotten men of sport. Most of us who are involved in sport know how quickly a sportsman or woman can be forgotten by the public and by those who used to support them.

My concluding remark on funding and sponsorship is on the touchy subject of tobacco sponsorship. It probably has greater cross-party support than many hon. Members are willing to accept. I am glad that the Opposition have not included total opposition to the funding of sport by the tobacco companies as part of their policies.

Most of us understand the medical dangers of smoking, and also that the Government have discouraged tobacco sponsorship in the past few years with the two voluntary agreements of 1977 and 1986. In the past decade, smoking has been reduced by some 20 per cent. I believe that such sponsorship must continue to be available to sports, should they want it. We live in a free country where smoking is a legitimate pastime, and long may it remain so. I do not smoke—it is a filthy habit—but I hope that others will continue to smoke and, by paying their taxes, keep my tax bill down.

On a more serious note, the tobacco companies have a substantial part to play in sport, not only in glamour sports such as cricket, motor racing and golf, but where money has, if I may use the phrase, filtered down to junior and other sports. If the Government banned the sponsorship and advertising of sport by the tobacco companies—I know that that has been mooted, not just in this place but in some higher echelons and even Downing street—it would be a sad day for sport. The substantial funding that comes from genuine people who want to help sport—and, admittedly, to sell their product—would be lost and the great institutions and events that have marked our sporting prowess over the past few years would also lose.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon on his excellent motion. If he had not moved it, it would certainly have been in my mind to do so, and I would have been more congratulatory of this excellent Government. At least we are doing something right, and that is the Government's policy for sport and recreation.

5.27 pm

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on introducing the debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) said, his speech was much sharper than the motion on the Order Paper. That often happens, as hon. Members are aware, and we have covered a wide area this afternoon.

I went to my constituency of Salford yesterday to see the beginning of Manchester United's victory parade. It started in Salford and went round the city in pouring rain. Thousands of people, many of them young, were out on the streets. Those young people were there to praise and congratulate the team. Many were participants in sport, but not enough.

The facilities in inner city areas have been dramatically reduced. As a consequence, we have to face the fact that sport has a part to play in the problems that exist in constituencies such as mine—youth unemployment and crime. If young unemployed people had something to do —such as sport—they would not become involved in such undersirable activities. Swimming has been mentioned in the debate. Councils in inner-city areas find it virtually impossible to maintain swimming pools because they are uneconomic and cannot be run at a profit. The councils need funds to do so. Those are examples of the problems faced.

In inner-city areas such as mine where land, particularly building land, is scarce, local authorities are forced to sell playing fields. When they do so, it means that those facilities have gone for ever—school playing fields no longer exist because they have been built on. We have recently heard much about the problems with the curriculum and teachers, who are giving up less and less of their spare time at the evenings and weekends to train and coach young people in sport. It is essential to have sports facilities and training if we want our society to be healthy.

The hon. Member for Swindon talked about excellence in sport, and named many of the sports people in the United Kingdom with good records. We applaud them, but the top footballers, cricketers and runners are in the minority in our society. The base must be strengthened. Unfortunately, the base has been weakened.

I was vice-chairman of the all-party football committee and am also chairman of the cricket committee. I asked a

[Mr. Stanley Orme]

question of the Secretary of State for National Heritage about the Sports Council's provisions for cricket and young people. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Sports Council is providing £130,000 per year for 1992-93 and 1993-94 to enable the National Cricket Association to employ 10 part-time regional cricket development officers, one of whose tasks is to promote links between schools and local cricket clubs. The council also gives £16,000 a year to the English Schools Cricket Association. In addition, three awards totalling £117,000 have already been made by our new Sportsmatch scheme to projects which will benefit youth cricket."—[*Official Report*, 10 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. *330*.]

Such a policy is worthy, but it represents peanuts. Our national sport needs much more funding than it is receiving at present.

Reference has been made to the Sports Council and the national lottery. The problem is that the Sports Council spreads its net widely. Therefore, if we are not careful, sports such as the national game of soccer, as well as cricket, could lose out against other activities. They will particularly do so if sport is to be linked—as it apparently will be—to the national lottery. Funds must be provided through the state for the provision of sports facilities. Sport is one of the major activities in our society, and leads to a healthier and happier nation. We have a responsibility not merely to say that it is somebody else's job, but to tell the electorate that we shall allocate funds to provide sports facilities.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that an effective way of making a little money go a long way would be to help many of the voluntary clubs, which exist in a great network up and down the country, to extend their facilities for coaching young people? The facilities exist, but are under-utilised, and topping up the finances a little might help to bring many people into a system that already exists.

Mr. Orme: I accept the hon. Gentleman's argument. The facilities exist, and people must be encouraged to use them. I was present at a Cricket Council meeting only last week where coaching and involving young people in cricket was the paramount subject in the discussion. It is possible that pupils at public schools and grammar schools are being taught cricket, but such skills are not being developed at secondary schools in inner-city areas such as those that I and many of my hon. Friends represent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde spoke of facilities and the implementation of some of the proposals in Lord Taylor's report. I listened to what my hon. Friend said about standing room at some grounds, and the difficulties that many clubs face in providing the necessary facilities. The Minister must consider that issue seriously.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde also mentioned ticket touts; that problem exists not just in soccer but in all sports, the theatre and wherever there are shortages of tickets. I know that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) once described ticket touting as market forces at their best. However, one would not say that if one was outside some of the football grounds. The Taylor report means that football grounds are to be reduced in size. A ground such as Manchester United's originally held 60,000 or 70,000. When the all-seater provisions are completed next year, it will hold only just over 40,000. Many other clubs will face a similar reduction in size, and the pressure for tickets will become greater and greater. If action is not taken, we shall have a recipe for trouble and danger.

Lord Taylor says something should be done about the problem, and he asked for legislation—I think that the Minister has ducked the issue and I do not know why. If we were to take action, I think that he would have the support of the sport and people. Ticket touts who exploit the position, whether at Wembley, Wimbledon or theatres, benefit only the minority. Only two years ago at Wembley, I saw tickets being snatched from people's hands. The police should have the power to detain those guilty of this offence before the game until it is over. I know that the practice cannot be abolished altogether. Tickets will always be exchanged elsewhere, but it should not be allowed outside grounds.

Mr. John Carlisle: The right hon. Gentleman must be aware that the Rugby Football Union issues tickets only through clubs, with the names of those clubs on them. If tickets are found to have been sold at increased prices later, the club in question loses its allocation. Would it not be better if association football did the same?

Mr. Orme: The sport has tried to tighten up, and we now know which clubs tickets have been allocated to, but some will always slip through the net. Much the same problem occurred this weekend at Wembley. I am all in favour of tightening up, but that is not always possible. Some form of legislation is needed.

As for pitch invasions, at Wembley stadium the other week I saw an experiment which, when implemented, will prevent people from climbing the barriers and invading the pitch. It involves a sort of moat, and a construction of metal on a firm base. Wembley hopes to introduce the system in time for the charity shield match in August.

Sometimes we are told not to worry about crowd invasions—after all, the fans of the winning team will usually be happy—but there can be difficulties when people try to stop games. We do not want a return to what happened at Hillsborough. I believe that action is needed, and the Taylor proposals should be implemented.

Support for Manchester's bid to host the Olympic games in the year 2000 is crucial. There is already widespread support for it, and the difficulties that remain can be overcome. Hosting the games will be beneficial not just for Manchester and the north-west, but for the whole of the United Kingdom. We will all thrive on, and benefit from, holding the games here.

5.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Robert Key): What an excellent debate this is turning out to be. I never doubted that it would be. It proves that when we are given the opportunity to debate sport in the House, we rise to the occasion. The subject is clearly important to many hon. Members.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on introducing the debate. I share his enthusiasm for sport and I know that his constituents at the northern end of Wiltshire are as enthusiastic about it as mine are at the southern end of the county. Of course, it is true that large numbers of our constituents believe that sport is extremely important to the quality of their lives, and they are right. It starts in schools; it is part of having

a healthy mind and a healthy body; and it continues throughout life. It is a matter of pride that we have sports that can be pursued by anyone of any age, able bodied and disabled alike.

Ever since I witnessed the remarkable achievements of our paralympic team in Barcelona last year, I have redoubled my enthusiastic support for sport for disabled people. It can enrich the quality of their lives enormously. We can all help in one way or another.

We should also pay tribute to the vast army of volunteers who make up the backbone of British sport. We should not forget the vast army of teachers on whom so much of our school sport depends, or the volunteers who spend their days taking young sportsmen and sportswomen around the country, keeping their kit clean, keeping the teams fed and watered and organising transport and teams. They are the unsung heroes of sport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) rightly pointed out the overspill advantages of Manchester's Olympic bid, which the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) also welcomed. We are determined that the bid will succeed. I think that we have done all that we conceivably could so far, and we shall maintain the pressure right through until the end of September. Winning the bid will mean a great boost for the tourist industry in the north-west and throughout the country.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), my habitual opponent across the Dispatch Box, took me to task for quite a lot. It is always a pleasure to see him at any time of day—sometimes we debate these matters quite late at night, too. It is always a pleasure to receive the delegations that he likes to bring to see me. We have done some good business together as a result of them.

On a note of criticism, however, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman had a single new idea to offer the House today or a single suggestion of how he would have done anything differently. He certainly asked a great string of questions, which I shall try to answer, but perhaps this just goes to show that, in the year since the Department set out on its course, we have managed to keep on a fairly even keel alongside each other in our quest to improve the quality of people's lives through sport.

Mr. Pendry: May I remind the Minister of just two of my suggestions? One was that he should go to Risley and see the development of the new standing areas in football grounds. The second was that he should get the Foundation for Sport and the Arts to give some money to anglers. There were many more suggestions, too.

Mr. Key: The point about Risley had already crossed my mind before the hon. Gentleman mentioned it, but I will certainly consider a visit during my hectic schedule. The hon. Gentleman might even get there before me and tell me about it——

Mr. Pendry: I have been there already.

Mr. Key: That is good news. We can have a chat about it over a cup of tea later. I look forward to going. As for angling, I am, as they say, coming to that.

The hon. Gentleman said that I should not be merely a conduit for information to other Departments. It is actually rather important that I do convey information to other Departments with responsibilities for sport, but the hon. Gentleman was right to say that I should not be just a lightning conductor for this or any other subject. I shall come to his points about ticket touts later in my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) made some important points—about the CCPR and about playing fields in particular.

It is of course important to play to win: that is the whole point of excellence in sport. I have discovered during the past year that it is politically correct to talk about elitism in sport—the only area of national life where that is permissible. Nevertheless, winning is not everything. There is much more to sport than just winning.

Let us get our facts straight about money going to sport from taxpayers and other sources. A lot of sport always has been and always will be entirely in the private sector, and does not depend on taxpayers' support. That is good. However, we have not been neglecting the taxpayers' interest in maintaining sport. Since 1979, the Sports Council's grant in aid has increased by 225 per cent. in cash terms and by 31 per cent. in real terms to its current level of some £50 million a year.

We must also include local authority spending, to which I shall return, and look at the new sources of finance, such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. We can even consider the way in which we have designed rate relief and, of course, we have discussed the national lottery. We are for ever questing after new sources of finance. On individual projects and facilities, we should remember that although people are concerned about the closure of swimming pools, sometimes pools are closed on purpose because it is better to have one big pool than five little pools, as Sheffield has discovered. It closed 11 to pay for its big one.

In 1981, there were just 964 indoor swimming pools in England. The number has grown rapidly and now that figure has increased by about 200. In 1981, England had 771 sports halls, but in 1992 the number had grown to 1,507—almost double. Artificial pitches were specifically mentioned in the debate. In 1981, England had just 30 such pitches, but now there are almost 300, a tenfold increase. Those who call for more such facilities should remember that the numbers have increased. I am delighted to say that that is true even for ice rinks. In 1981, there were 23, but now there are 40—almost double.

I was asked about the Department for Education's letter about playing fields. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are pressing for a response on the outcome of the consultation exercise. We attach importance to long-term school and community need being taken into account before playing fields are disposed of. We discussed that in the last sports debate, and I hope that we are nearer a conclusion.

I was asked about the Foundation for Sport and the Arts in connection with angling. We have agreed to a subsidiary third purpose being inserted in the trust deed to enable non-athletic activities that are likely to promote or enhance physical health or excellence to be the subject of grants. That is a step forward. I am pleased at the funding of angling by the Sports Council, because I am an angler. If I ever have the time after receiving delegations organised by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde, I will no doubt be able to do more fishing. I have always been a fisherman and I am disappointed by the reported view of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Of course, it is a matter for the trustees, who are entirely independent of

[Mr. Key]

ministerial or other imposition, and we must respect that. In the context of the new third purpose, I intend to try to establish the reasons for the foundation's attitude.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde spoke about the GAH report. As he kindly said, I wrote to him about that on 13 May following questions last Monday. As I said in that letter, the report does not represent the Government's views on the operational issues that it addresses. It will be for potential bidders to assess the extent to which the report will be of any use to them. GAH gave us an undertaking that it would not work for potential bidders. That is as far as I wish to go on that. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is clear that we have already been assured by the consultants that the report was an entirely separate document from the one that they produced for us.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): As the Minister knows, there was what might be termed a song and dance in debate on the Bill, and certainly in Committee, about the GAH report. That report is now readily available to those who are prepared to pay for it, but it was never made available to members of the Committee. What has changed so dramatically in the interim to make it now available in the public domain when it was not available before?

Mr. Key: It is because it is not the same report. There is no doubt about that. It is up to that commercial company whether it wishes to sell the information. However, I hope that it will abide by the commitments that it gave us.

I mentioned the letter about playing fields. The National Playing Fields Association and the Sports Council want to prevent the loss of recreational land and the Sports Council's grant in aid settlement from the Government for 1991-92 included some £500,000 specifically to enable the establishment of a register of recreational land. Work is currently in hand and is progressing well with the Sports Council, the NPFA and the Central Council of Physical Recreation as co-sponsor. The register should be up and running by next month, which is good news.

In addition, planning policy guidance note No. 17 emphasises the importance that the Government place on the need for recreational land and open spaces. It asks local authorities to take full account of the community's need for recreational space and to consider the long-term need for playing fields before allowing them to be developed. It also asks them to consult sporting bodies when planning for sport and recreation.

I was asked about pitch invasions. Lord Justice Taylor said that there is no panacea that will achieve total safety and cure all problems of behaviour and crowd control. However, he was satisfied that seating does more to achieve those objectives than any other measure. Apart from being more comfortable than someone who has to stand, a seated spectator is not jostled or swayed and is not involved in crowd surges. Those who monitor numbers know exactly how many people are in a given area in an all-seater stadium because they do not have to assess crowd density by visual impression. Seating also has distinct advantages in assisting crowd control, in conjunction with stewarding and closed circuit television.

Mr. Pendry: I think that the Minister has missed the point. The statute book contains the Football (Offences) Act 1990 which specifically relates to pitch invasion. I asked the Minister to ensure that magistrates and the police were made aware of that so that the Act can be enforced. I also said that at Manchester City's ground people invaded the pitch from the new all-seater facilities.

Mr. Key: I do not think that there will ever be a way to keep everybody off the pitch all the time. We need to understand the reasons more clearly. The hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Salford, East spoke about the Football (Offences) Act 1990. I propose to quote the figures, which show that the Act is working quite well. The latest figures for 1991-92 show that there were 276 arrests for running on to the pitch, 42 arrests for throwing missiles and 77 arrests for chanting racial abuse. The legislation is beginning to bite and it will continue to bite.

The issue of ticket touts is important. The right hon. Member for Salford, East was right to say that the practice is disagreeable, to put it at its mildest. There have been wide consultations in government and with those who are affected. However, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said, the problem extends beyond football. He mentioned Buckingham palace, about which there was some concern.

The palace operation will take care of that problem. It is being designed by the Royal Household, which is in charge of it and has sought and been given a great deal of sound advice. The Palace Household is confident that there will not be a ticket touting problem, which would be most unpleasant and disagreeable. I confirm that the Government intend to legislate on the matter at the earliest opportunity, because we cannot side-step the problem for ever.

Safe terracing is an important topic, so I shall return to it briefly. We are consulting the Football Licensing Authority about the extent to which clubs will be required to upgrade their terracing in line with the recommendations of the Football Stadia Advisory Design Council report on safe terracing. That document was published at the end of March and it augments the advice already available to clubs in our guide to safety at sports grounds.

As to relocation and redevelopment, the all-seater requirement was not suddenly imposed out of nowhere. Clubs have been aware of it since the Government's response to the Taylor report was published in January 1990. It was accepted by the football authorities when it was first imposed. Most of the clubs that began to plan for all-seating stadiums at that time will have little difficulty in meeting the deadline. However, I recognise that some clubs face problems.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): My hon. Friend will recall that, only a few weeks ago, he kindly received a delegation from Grimsby Town football club. He was helpful in giving us advice as to what we should do there. However, I have to advise him that we have not yet heard from the Football Licensing Authority, which I know he was contacting on our behalf. Will he put further pressure on it to get in touch with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and me, as we are expecting to meet it following the representations that he was going to make on our behalf?

Mr. Key: Yes, of course I will. We had an extremely constructive discussion with Grimsby Town football club

and the Members of Parliament concerned. My hon. Friend was at his most reasonable, but was nevertheless forceful, in pressing the case of his constituents, but I have already pointed out to him that it is a matter for the FLA. If there is to be any departure from the policy, it must be on the recommendation of the FLA to Ministers. I hope that we can ensure that my hon. Friend's problem is solved. The FLA has given clear guidelines of the circumstances in which it would be prepared to consider a relaxation of the time scale and clubs are aware of that.

A number of hon. Members have mentioned to me the problem of clubs bogged down by planning problems. The Department of the Environment issued PPG 17 in September 1991 to encourage local planning authorities to give sympathetic consideration to proposals from clubs in the light of the 1994 deadline. It is for clubs to ensure that their development proposals are realistic and sensitive to planning concerns.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde asked about new horizons. I do not accept the Sports Council's analysis of local authority expenditure. Both the current and the capital spend have been increasing: in 1986-87, the net current spend was £362 million and in 1992-93 it was £462 million. The capital spend in 1986-87 was £161 million and in 1992-93 it was £240 million. There are also, as I mentioned a little while ago, substantial new funds for sport from the Football Trust, the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and, in future, the lottery. The Sports Council will have a key role in lottery distribution. We do not want to channel all the funds available for sport exclusively through the Sports Council.

I shall now comment on an important point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North, who drew attention to the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at the annual general meeting of the Central Council of Physical Recreation last week. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to reiterate what was said then. My right hon. Friend said that the Department for National Heritage

"has made substantial new proposals which assure the CCPR a stable and sound financial future and basis of representation."

He assured the CCPR that it had

"nothing to fear from the restructuring, nor the terms of involvement that the Government has proposed. The CCPR has expressed its goodwill and I hope that I have made plain the Government's."

That is important and I hope that any misunderstandings can be cleared up.

As the House will know, the Government are putting in place more sensible structures for Government funding of sport. After 21 years of service to sport, the Sports Council of Great Britain is to be replaced by two new bodies. I hope that it will be helpful if I clear up a few of the misconceptions. The logic is quite simple, and has commanded support across the sporting spectrum. The current Great Britain Sports Council has never been able to fulfil, even to its own satisfaction, a wider Great Britain role on issues that cut across home country boundaries. Therefore, it has operated, and been seen, largely as a de facto Sports Council for England. The Government recognised a gap between the need and the reality.

The United Kingdom Sports Commission will meet the need. It will be a body that argues for Britain in international sporting arenas, making sure that no one doubts our status, or fails to understand our ambitions, as a major sporting nation. It will also take the lead in bringing together home country interests on those major strategic issues that can sensibly be addressed only at United Kingdom level. Among those I number the promotion of sport here and overseas, research, the exchange of information and expertise and the development of the facilities and specialist services—doping control, sports medicine and science—that support performance and excellence and that are most cost-effectively developed at United Kingdom level for the benefit of all.

It is not a body that will be in charge of the home country sports councils or that will have ambitions to take them over—that way lies political and administrative madness. However, the UKSC begs a big question. The Government have played their proper role, and enabled and facilitated. We have provided the framework for right-minded and forward-thinking sports people to create a launching pad for sport into the 21st century. We do not claim to have created a sporting utopia, but we have created a forum that will allow others to achieve substantial forward movement. The question is therefore whether the full range of sporting interests are ready to take advantage of the opportunity that we have provided.

The second body to be created is the Sports Council for England. That recognises the reality that the current Sports Council has inevitably been primarily an English body. England will now have its own dedicated sports council, with a role compatible with the other home country sports councils. The Sports Council for England will have a natural interest in the development of performance and excellence in England, working with the UKSC. Its principal role will be creating the conditions which allow performance and excellence to thrive: getting people of all ages into sport and active recreational pursuits and helping the young to gain basic sporting skills. In that, there is enormous continuing scope for partnership with local authorities.

Membership of both bodies will be drawn from governmental organisations and the voluntary sports sector. It will also include a good leavening of non-representative members: people from those areas of life whose skills, in planning, management, business and law are essential in shaping organisations, people who can articulate what they are about and how they are going to go about it. I am also looking to increase the number of women in membership, and for members still active in their sport. We are also still on target for 1 October for completion of that stage of the process.

I have mentioned briefly the role of local authorities in working with the new Sports Council structure. I should like to emphasise that we recognise the achievements of local authorities as enablers and providers of sports facilities, which are so important to the implementation of Sport for All. The reform of local government provides an opportunity to provide a structure that reduces bureaucracy and enables more cost-effective service delivery of sport and recreation.

I congratulate local authorities on the way in which many of them already ensure that in planning their leisure services they take account of the mutual benefits and opportunities created by looking not only at sports but at arts, enjoyment of the countryside and tourism as aspects of leisure provision rather than as discrete and competing services. This is what the Department of National Heritage is doing, and it is not over-egging it to say that some local authorities have been doing that for some time anyway.

[Mr. Key]

More can be achieved and the move towards a more unitary structure will facilitate an integrated approach to leisure management and provision. Unitary authorities in what are now the English shires will bring together many aspects of sport and physical recreation with libraries and other services that are the domain of the county councils and provide a single focus for the development and funding of the performing arts.

I assure hon. Members that I well appreciate the need to ensure that in any new structure the opportunities are there, through voluntary agreement and co-operation, to provide those specialist sport and recreation services such as coaches and sports development officers that may be beyond the means of any one individual authority.

The key task of the Department of National Heritage is to provide, at the national level, a stimulus to that integrated approach by melting away some of the barriers that might previously have existed between agencies, each concerned with its own aspect of activity. To that end, we intend to host a seminar later this summer to which we will be inviting our main sponsored bodies, including the Sports Council, to examine where greater co-ordination would be of benefit at national and regional level. In turn, that will provide the springboard for a series of regional conferences to foster the necessary regional collaboration to inform resource allocation decisions across the broad area of leisure service provision, including sport.

Important as the UKSC, the sports councils and local authorities will be in shaping the future direction of British sport, they cannot succeed by themselves. The continuing health of British sport is largely dependent on their ability to manage effectively and to promote individual sports. The new structure can be made that much more effective if it works in harness with an efficient and rejuvenated voluntary sector. Indeed, the potential of the UKSC to promote performance and excellence at the United Kingdom level can be fully realised only if it is buttressed and supported by the governing bodies of sport, as well as such key independent and influential agencies as the British Olympic Association and the Sports Aid Foundation, of which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) is now chairman.

It goes without saying that the best sportsmen and sportswomen deserve the best managers and administrators. Sporting success on the track depends to a significant extent on management success off it. Despite all its achievements, British sport has been justifiably criticised for neglecting the relationship between excellence in competition and excellence in administration. There are welcome signs that British sport has recognised that, to prepare itself for the 21st century, it must develop a meritocracy in which young and competent volunteers are trained, nurtured and rewarded on the basis of their talent and where the enthusiasm of volunteers can be complemented by the expertise of professionals.

Last October, I mentioned the proposed introduction of national and Scottish vocational qualifications in sport and recreation. They have now been introduced. The new qualification and occupational standards should provide a valuable framework that places people in the sport and recreation industry on a par with those in other sectors of the economy. There have been other efforts by the Sports Council, the British Olympic Association, the national sports development centres and the British Association of National Sports Administrators to ensure that the quality of education is improved.

On the subject of local authority funding, I have referred only to the estimated outturn, but I can now inform hon. Members that provisional indications are that gross capital expenditure by local authorities in England for sport and active recreation rose from £166 million in 1986-87 to £240 million in 1992-93, although that latter figure is subject to revision. Therefore, there is increased funding for sport.

I am anxious to make progress because I know that there are still many hon. Members who wish to speak. The Foundation for Sport and the Arts has been mentioned and I echo the congratulations of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North. Inner-city sport has also been mentioned. I take particular interest in that subject, not least as the city action team Minister responsible for Manchester and Salford.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Salford, East that inner-city sport is very important. I have visited the right hon. Gentleman's constituency many times, especially during the past two years. I was impressed by the quality of the teaching staff in the schools in his constituency—and, indeed, in other constitutencies throughout the country—and their determination to ensure that sport is an important part of the life of their schools, as well as part of the curriculum. Sportsmatch has also been a tremendous success since I launched it last November. I am sure that it will continue to be so.

Hon. Members referred to the national lottery, and much has been said on that matter in the House during the past couple of months. I hope that I have managed to answer the questions about football.

I want briefly to refer to Swindon Town football club because my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon initiated the debate. The club is renowned for playing attractive football—family football, not to put too fine a point on it. It finished fifth in the first division of the football league and therefore qualifies for the promotion play-offs for a place in the premier league next season. Swindon Town has been at the county ground since 1895. When the Taylor report was published, the ground had 5,030 seats; it now has 8,900 seats, partly due to the recent extension to the north stand. The total capacity for the ground is now 18,132. I understand that the average league attendance this season has been about 11,000—a figure which no doubt includes many of my constituents.

Swindon Town has abandoned its earlier plans to relocate to a new ground and is planning to replace, at the end of the season, the Shrivenham road stand with a new, 5,000, all-seated stand. That will cost about £1·4 million. There are also plans to seat and cover the Stratton bank stand at the end of next season, giving the ground an all-seated capacity of 20,100.

Swindon Town may face planning problems that could prevent it from meeting the 1994 deadline. As I told the House, it is for the Football Licensing Authority to decide whether there can be any moratorium. If my hon. Friend wishes to discuss any further details with me, as always I shall be delighted to accommodate him.

We have had a remarkably detailed debate. It is good when hon. Members can get down to the detail rather than just shout at each other across the Chamber. We shall wish to return to many, many issues, but I want to conclude my remarks with a few words about the Manchester Olympic

bid. There is no doubt that it is the most exciting prospect for sport in Britain for many years. The Government's commitment is absolutely certain and we do not envisage any problem with funding the bid from a variety of sources.

When we discussed national lottery funds in Committee, we explored ways in which it might be appropriate for the Manchester Olympic organisation to bid for some of those funds at some stage. That might be from the millennium fund or from some other part of the lottery funds; that is not for me to decide. However, surely there is no need to rule out that possibility at this stage. I find it astonishing that some hon. Members, including some from the Manchester area, seem determined to rule out that potential source of finance.

I would not like to predict the result when the International Olympic Committee votes in Monaco on 23 September on which country will host the Olympic games in the year 2000. The Manchester bid—which, after all, is also the British bid—offers a great opportunity for Olympic celebration. It is thoroughly realistic and I still think that it will win. It certainly deserves to succeed. I look forward to decision day with great optimism.

There may be points that I have not covered during my response and I should be happy to pursue them outside the Chamber. I hope that I have answered the debate generally and the points raised in particular. I look forward to doing so on the next occasion that we debate sport. We have already had two sports debates in the past year, which is a record. I hope that we continue to reflect the sporting aspirations of all our constituents, which are so important to the quality of life of our people.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Only 42 minutes remain for this debate and there are still five hon. Members wishing to catch my eye. With a little co-operation, all may be successful.

6.18 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I had not intended to speak in the debate; I came only to listen. It was my understanding that my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) intended to speak about rugby league fooball. However, he was at Old Trafford yesterday and was last seen in a state of some emotional distress after Wigan was beaten—thank goodness—by St. Helens.

I must say how nice it was that Featherstone Rovers won the divisional championship. We, too, had a first yesterday, because my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) attended his first rugby league football game. He also had his education completed at Old Trafford yesterday.

This debate has been interesting and wide-ranging, but it has tended to concentrate, understandably, on soccer. The second most popular spectator sport in Britain is rugby league football. Many do not understand the importance of that sport.

Those of us who have the good fortune to come from rugby league-playing areas are concerned that many soccer-related problems have come home to rugby league clubs—which have had to pick up the tab for meeting the statutory implications of sports ground safety legislation and of the Taylor report.

Spectator safety applies to every sport, but rugby league—which has an excellent reputation as a well organised family sport that attracts big, extremely well-behaved crowds—was faced with huge bills and big problems as a consequence of problems that first arose in another sport. I hope that the Minister will address that point more so than has been the case recently.

I made a lengthy speech during the Report stage of the National Lottery etc. Bill, and I will not repeat the points that I made then, but I emphasise the concern in rugby league at the clear and blatant discrimination against many involved in that particular sport—primarily by the rugby union authorities.

The question of professionalism within rugby union was mentioned by the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). I agree with him that the Rugby Union's view of amateurism is looking a little like the emperor's new clothes—extremely thin. Everyone knows that, to all intents and purposes, rugby union in many areas is totally professional—much more so in many respects than rugby league. One or two of us are growing tired of that, and I hope that the Minister will address with the rugby union authorities the manner in which they treat certain people, which is somewhat outdated, to put it mildly.

There is concern also in rugby league about discrimination in the armed forces. It seems strange in this day and age that those who want to play rugby league in the armed forces are refused permission to do so. I hope that more progress can be made with that, because such discrimination is unacceptable.

There is concern about the way in which the media treat rugby league. The media, based as they are in south-east England, largely disregard rugby league, although it is the second most popular spectator sport in the country. Very little effort is made to report the game. Some of us are getting fed up with the way that the media trivialise certain issues. We are sick to death, for example, of reading about the problem of Gazza's knee. Millions of people in this country could not care a damn about Gazza's knee. We want to read about sport, not that kind of nonsense.

That struck me when I was returning from a meeting on Friday evening, and listened to the news headlines on Radio 2. The lead item was the Venables affair at Tottenham Hotspur—not Bosnia or the schoolchild hostages in Paris. Do the people who run the media in this country really think that is the kind of thing that people want to hear or read about? The consequence of such an approach is that millions of people are largely ignorant of the important sport of rugby league.

I vividly remember having a conversation, just over a year ago, with the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), who was then the Minister responsible for sport. He had just attended his first ever rugby league. He had never seen one before in his life, yet he is roughly the same age as me. He raved about what a spectacle it was, with its finesse and the skills of its players. He had never seen it before except on television, presented by the likes—sadly—of Eddie Wareing. Our game deserves better, and I hope that the Minister will mention in appropriate places that rugby league needs to be treated more seriously.

Many of my hon. Friends not present for this debate subscribe to the game of rugby league and want it to have a fairer deal than it does now. We want proper recognition of the important contribution that sport makes, and action on some well-known problems.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

It strikes me that this has been an all-male debate—no female Members are present in the Chamber at the moment. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House should address the fact that sport and debates on sport tend to be all-male affairs. We lose as a nation by disregarding the interest and role of women in sport.

One of the most rapidly expanding sports in Britain is women's rugby league. For the third or fourth year running, my constituency boasts the champion women's rugby league side. I hope that we will address women's issues as well as the wider issues of rugby league and of sport in general.

6.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves (Birmingham, Hall Green): Much has already been said, very ably, by my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) and by other hon. Friends and Opposition Members. I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) reiterate his arguments about rugby league, because, although I follow both rugby union and rugby league avidly on television, I had no idea of the complications that have entered into the relationship between rugby union and rugby league, or of the way that rugby league players have been treated by rugby union officials. It is good that such issues can be aired in a debate such as this, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will use his good offices to resolve that matter quickly.

Sport has an important role to play in our country in social cohesion, particularly in urban areas. I do not underestimate the importance of country sports to the way in which people live in the country and appreciate the countryside—but in urban areas, sport offers cohesion, a sense of belonging, and a degree of humanity to vast numbers of people, who can occupy their time in a pleasurable way.

That is particularly true of inner-city or urban areas. I am pleased at the way that my own city has, on a bipartisan and apolitical basis, promoted the provision of facilities with our national indoor arena, which was recently the venue of world gymnastics competitions.

Having served on the Committee that considered the National Lottery, etc. Bill, I greatly look forward to its introduction. Money from the lottery will greatly aid the provision of capital funding for some of the purposes to which right hon. and hon. Members have alluded, such as all-weather playing fields for football or cricket and of indoor tennis courts—in which this country is sadly lacking.

There is a simple reason so few British players win at Wimbledon. For most of the year they cannot play, because there are not enough indoor tennis courts. Surely that is an ideal target for capital funding from the national lottery.

Hon. Members have also referred to skating rinks and swimming pools. Recently, a community centre was set up in Hall Green, in my constituency: I hope that swimming pools will be provided in other areas, especially urban areas. I also hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will use his influence to ensure that Olympic-sized pools are not forgotten.

A plethora of community centres are springing up around the country, with engagingly shaped pools—kidney-shaped and heart-shaped—but such facilities are no good for sportsmen. I hope that my hon. Friend will encourage local authorities, planners and designers to provide straight runs. This is a practical proposal, and one that will not cost money: it is simply a question of directing influence appropriately.

I also hope that the Minister will consult more widely about the role of the organisations that look after British sport. I am thinking of the CCPR—which has already been mentioned—and the Sports Council, and about the effectiveness of the distribution of money.

My hon. Friend has mentioned the sizeable administration costs incurred by the Sports Council, and, in Committee stage on the National Lottery etc. Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth (Mr. Coe) spoke of trying to get to grips with the problem when he was a member of the Sports Council. He found it somewhat intractable. I hope that the Minister will try to ensure that sport is rather better served by the institutions that are there to promote it.

I have a particular interest in two or three specific issues, one of which is greyhound racing. I know that the Minister has no responsibility for such matters as evening betting; let me remind him, however, that greyhound racing is very popular. Huge numbers of spectators turn up and enjoy it greatly.

I agree with many others interested in the sport that, if betting shops are allowed to open late to cover such meetings, it is only reasonable for them to pay a levy towards an activity from which they are gaining a living; that applies to horse racing, after all. I hope that my hon. Friend will make that point to my hon. Friend Minister of State, Home Office, who spoke on such matters in Committee stage on the National Lottery etc. Bill. Greyhound racing needs support, and that support should be given by those who make a living from bets on it.

I know that my hon. Friend would expect me to mention drugs. The right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) has told us that sport can contribute to the creation of a happier and healthier nation, but we want to ensure that sport itself is healthy. Nowadays, sadly, professionalism is creeping in—along with a number of parasites who insist on trying to promote the use of drugs. They persuade sportsmen—sometimes kidding them, sometimes cajoling—that they will perform better if they fill their bodies with unspeakable chemicals.

I was concerned to hear from various sources that the Sports Council had cut its subsidy to clubs, associations and sports that undertake voluntary drug testing. I hope that my hon. Friend will investigate that, and will put all the necessary pressure on the Sports Council to devote the necessary resources to this serious problem.

I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House would feel very ashamed if—in the next Olympic games, or in those held in Manchester—more British athletes were sent home, having been disqualified on the basis of drugs charges. Such incidents are a disgrace to us, and a disgrace to British sport.

I hope that the Minister will take the problem seriously, and will continue to try to persuade his colleagues at the Home Office that a change in the law is required. I hope that he will help to ensure that—within the structure of sport itself—it is accepted by federations, promoters and sponsors alike that they should sponsor only sportsmen who are prepared to be tested for drugs.

Perhaps he will have a gentle word with the Institute of Sports Sponsorship, the Advertising Standards Authority and the companies that are major sponsors of sport. I am sure that he is in regular contact with them. I do not believe that any hon. Member wants sportsmen who abuse drugs to be promoted or sponsored by commercial companies.

Mr. Key: I was surprised to hear what my hon. Friend just told me; I shall, of course, check it. The Sports Council spends some £750,000 a year on drug testing.

My hon. Friend may wish to know that, in recognition of this country's contribution, we have been chosen to host the fourth permanent world conference on anti-doping in sport, which will take place in London in September.

Mr. Hargreaves: I am delighted to hear that, and I thank my hon. Friend for investigating the other matter that I raised.

We can tackle the drugs problem, without spending huge amounts, by ensuring that everyone is on the same side—the side of clean sport. That includes promoters, television companies, sponsors and federations. I understand that some of those—including the television companies—have said that, in future, they will contemplate drugs testing; I hope that the promoters will take into account, and that the Minister will give them the necessary encouragement.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) for choosing such an excellent topic, and appreciate the comments made by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

6.37 pm

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): Given the phrasing of the motion, Conservative Members were bound to exhibit a certain complacency; however, I do not think that, at this juncture, our sporting nation has any cause for complacency. First, I do not think that enough of our people participate in sport, because they do not have the facilities or the opportunity to do so. It is no accident that Britain is the cardiac capital of Europe; that may have something to do with diet, but it is also due to a lack of exercise and participation in sport.

We have nothing to be complacent about in our country's sporting achievements. Our national football side has played only once in the world cup final—when it had the advantage of playing on home ground; our national cricket team had disastrous tours of India and Sri Lanka recently, it lost at home to Pakistan last year and in general has had a grim record in recent years.

I wish the British Lions rugby team well for their tour of New Zealand, but I think that it would be optimistic to expect them to do tremendously well against a New Zealand side playing in its own hemisphere.

As has already been pointed out, Britain last produced a tennis champion more than 60 years ago. Our achievements are nothing to write home about. The overall performance of British teams give no cause for complacency.

I have one plaudit to bestow on the Government: I realise that £55 million has been devoted to pump-priming the Olympic games bid. We are all—not least those of us who represent constituencies in the north-west—united in hoping that that bid proves successful.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Reference has been made to the fact that the debate is male-dominated. Will my hon. Friend therefore acknowledge that Britain has produced some women tennis champions more recently than in the past 60 years?

Mr. Davies: I accept that. I should have made it clear that I was referring to male tennis champions, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for correcting me.

I congratulate the Government on their support for the Olympic games bid, whose success would, of course, bring particular advantages to my constituency, not least because we hope to stage the hockey tournament at Boundary Park in Oldham.

There are three respects in which the Government ought to take a much more proactive part in the development of sport. First, we need a full audit of our sporting facilities, including the extent to which local authorities have been obliged to cut their capital expenditure in recent years and the consequent withdrawal of sporting facilities. The reduction in shared, joint-use facilities in schools is partly attributable to the development of local management of schools. I feel that opting out will increase the extent to which schools protect their own resources and will make them less willing to make those resources available to the wider community; I regret that.

Secondly, I see no reason why we do not accept that the Americans have it right. Why on earth should not excellence in sport extend to higher education? Why should not we have sporting scholarships? Why does not the Minister speak to his colleagues in the Department for Education and say that he expects our universities—many of which are at last laying greater emphasis on skill rather then merely on the cultivation of the intellect—to use sporting scholarships to encourage excellence in sport? What of the income that we derive from staging the most prestigious tennis tournament of them all—the Wimbledon millions? Not enough of those resources are ploughed back into the sport.

At the very least, our universities could give more support to tennis. Someone with slightly sub-standard A-levels can get in to Oxford or Cambridge if he shows promise in rowing or rugby, and I have always failed to understand why it is all right for those two sports to be encouraged at those institutions of higher education, when our major sports are not encouraged by the development of sporting scholarships in higher education.

Finally, let me refer to the spectre at the feast, to which little reference has been made today. The Minister and his Department have some direct responsibility for the role of television in the development of sport. In this age of fragmented culture, individualism and loss of identity, we should recognise the extent to which major sporting events provide some social cohesion. Sport is something to which people can relate, and television is bound to play its part in the process. I do not think that the list of great sporting events available on national television is long enough.

I regret the BSkyB deal, which has fragmented the presentation of British football. In particular, the Minister will come in for severe criticism later this year when crucial matches—in which England will take on Holland and Norway and which will help to secure our participation in the world cup—will be on restricted television because of that ridiculous deal. The Broadcasting Act 1990 is defective, and it is time that something was done about it.

[Mr. Davies]

The strength of British sport depends on the extent to which we can nourish the grass roots of the next generation. That means that we must do three things: we must monitor local authorities' performance and give them more resources; we must badger the Department of Education to increase sporting scholarships; and we must protect our sporting culture by ensuring that nationwide television has the right to broadcast all our key sporting events for a national audience.

6.45 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I am delighted to have the opportunity to address the House—albeit briefly, as I know that at least one other hon. Member wishes to speak—and I join those who have congratulated my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) on having initiated the debate.

I have the great privilege to be the secretary of the Conservative Back-Bench sports committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle). As a new hon. Member, I have done my best to become involved in the promotion of sport.

Given that I represent half of one of Britain's great sporting towns, it gives me particular pleasure to be able to address the House in the week of the 40th anniversary of one of our greatest sporting triumphs—the Matthews FA cup final. I have been pleased to note the tributes that have properly been paid this week to the great team that won that final, many of whom still live in my constituency and one of whom I know well; I refer to Bill Perry who, at the very end of that historic final, scored a goal from Sir Stanley Matthews's pass to beat Bolton Wanderers 4-3.

What a pleasure it has been to be able to celebrate the 40th anniversary of that historic triumph while also celebrating the fact that Blackpool has managed to escape relegation by a single point a season after rightfully winning promotion. I look forward to great triumphs for Blackpool next season, when it is hoped that we will be promoted yet again, and I pay tribute to all those who have been involved with the club this year.

I also pay tribute to those involved in other sports, including rugby under both codes. Despite what has been said today, there are many towns, including Blackpool, where rugby league and rugby union are well supported. Swimming is also doing well in Blackpool, as are many other sports.

I wish to address some of the wider sporting issues that have been raised in the debate. I was fortunate enough to be heavily involved in the campaign to raise funds to enable two distinguished disabled athletes in my constituency to go to the paralympics, in which they participated with great success. Both were members of the British paralympic fencing team, which was highly successful, and both came back with medals. I pay tribute —on a cross-party and a non-party basis—to all those who worked hard to raise funds to enable those athletes and others to attend. It has been a privilege for me to champion in the House the cause of sport for the disabled, and I hope to continue to do so.

I also join my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon in paying tribute to the National Coaching Foundation. Early in 1991, the Government gave £700,000 to promote quality after-school sport opportunities for young people. A scheme known as Champion Coaching was the product of that funding. The project was designed to provide coaches to help young people to develop their sporting abilities and adopt active life styles. It got off to a strong start and, by the beginning of 1992, it had agreed to sponsor no fewer than 24 training schemes throughout the country as well as setting up no fewer than 136 schools of sport, each with a professional coach, 24 physical education roadshows and 24 parent workshops.

Those of us who have participated in the Lords and Commons rugby XV were fortunate enough to meet last autumn some of those involved in the National Coaching Foundation. I pay tribute to everyone associated with the foundation, and to the chief executive, Sue Campbell, for all her work. I pay tribute, too, to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, which has been mentioned in the debate and whose tie I have the privilege to wear today. The FSA was able to increase the NCF's funding, with an initial grant of £300,000 in recognition of the fact that it was of enormous benefit to children throughout the country and deserved to grow.

A few months later; the Foundation for Sport and the Arts gave a further £1·3 million, set aside by the trustees of that foundation to fund future expansion and new projects for the National Coaching Foundation. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon was right to pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in providing funding for the National Coaching Foundation, and I look forward to its work continuing.

The hon. Members for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry) and for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) were, uncharacteristically, somewhat negative and grudging in their remarks about what the Government have rightly done for sport. I know that both of them believe, as I do, in the future of sport, and particularly in the development of sport for young people. I know that their speeches were uncharacteristically negative and that they would wish to join me in paying tribute to the work done for sport in this country.

I hope that we can look forward to a successful cricket season. I should mention, in the light of the comments made about the absence of lady Members, that we should pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) who became the first two lady Members to play for the Lords and Commons cricket side. I have played cricket with them in successive fixtures already this season. I look forward to the continued participation of lady Members in sport in the future.

Once again, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon for giving us the opportunity to debate this important subject. I look forward to speaking at greater length on this important issue in a future debate.

6.50 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I am probably a unique participant in this debate because in the halcyon days of my youth, before I, like the Minister, was horizontally challenged and before the colour of my hair matured, I was a physical education teacher. I take issue with the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) because his motion ignores the symbiosis between sport and

physical education. The one cannot be separated from the other. The motion could have been corrected by that addition.

My speech, in common with those of my hon. Friends, will be somewhat negative because I do not see a great deal to congratulate the Government on over the past 14 years. I will explain why. Very simply, there has been a tremendous failure to foster school sport. It is not a failure of the past 14 years, but a cultural one, because this country has not recognised the importance of sport and physical education.

One of the things that I learned when rounding myself as a person, metaphorically speaking, during my physical education course was a lot about the history of sport and physical education. I learned a lot about the philosophy of the ancients towards sport and education. It was something that was adapted over the centuries and integrated into the public school ethos, and later the university one towards sport and physical education. But it is not something which fits with our time.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) that our universities are much ignored at the present time. They face a particular problem. The university athletics unions are very concerned about the effect on sport of the Government's measures involving the student unions. I urge the Ministers to assuage their doubts about the future of sport in the universities.

I think that we should take the Olympics with a pinch of salt. The ancients treated participants in the Olympics as great heroes. In this day and age they are heroes of a different sort; for many of them the Olympics are a means of making an awful lot of money rather than anything else. I accept, however, that the Olympics are the apex of the sporting pyramid.

If I had to give any advice to the Minister—far be it from me, a humble Back Bencher, to give him advice—I believe that he should encourage participation in sport as opposed to the spectator element. We have all witnessed the unseemly row between certain elements controlling Tottenham Hotspur football club. I do not believe that that has done that club any good. Hon. Members have commented on the way in which the media have reported it. That row has not done the media or the sport any favours, and it certainly has not done any favours to our young people.

I echo what other hon. Friends have said about women's sport. I hate to say it, but the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) gave a great deal away about the reactionary attitude towards that sector of sport. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was expressing his own prejudices and was honest enough to admit that, but we must recognise that half the population is made up of women. They have had a tough time and they deserve a far better deal, whether they are playing rugby union, rugby league, touch football, hockey or amateur soccer. It ill behoves us not to provide that better deal and I sincerely hope that the Minister will do so.

One of the other things that I learned from my student days studying physical education was that sport and physical education have been neglected by all Governments. There is an indissoluble link between the physical condition and the mental one. I am sure that the Minister will remember that immortal Latin phrase "mens sana in corpore sano". That certainly applies to the health of the nation. The only time that any Government ever appear to take any note of the worth and value of sport and physical education is, sadly, in time of war, when the people who have been recruited are found to be totally unfit. Governments then provide the impetus for improved standards of sport and physical education for the great mass of the population, not the elite.

It would certainly be in the Minister's interest and that of the nation if he remembered that there is a huge, growing problem with general fitness. That problem is not evident only among people of my own age or that of the Minister, but applies to the younger generation. We must catch them young and we must encourage them.

We must be careful, however, to avoid extremes. We do not want the Government to act with complete dereliction of interest towards sport, nor do we want to follow the former East German example, where sport was used purely for propaganda purposes. The American example represents the limbo between those extremes. Extremely high sporting standards are achieved by that country whether in Olympic, collegiate or professional sports, but the vast mass of American young people do not participate actively in sport. I hope that the Minister will take note of that.

I also echo the concern expressed by a number of my hon. Friends about the damage done to school sport by a number of factors, including the burden imposed on teachers by the implementation of the national curriculum and testing. Of even greater importance, however, is the fact that morale in the teaching profession has been so undermined that teachers often have neither the time nor, sadly, the inclination to give up the many hours that they used to devote to sport. That is a sad feature of the new system.

I need not repeat what my hon. Friends have said about the number of school playing fields that have fallen into disuse or have been sold off and will never be bought back. It is tragic that local authority after local authority, regardless of political complexion, has had to sell off that land to balance the books. That is no way to encourage sport.

I should like to end on an optimistic note. I have always opposed the national lottery in principle, but I accept that one will be introduced. I urge the Minister and the Secretary of State to do all that they can within their power to correct the imbalance whereby a projected 4 per cent. of the proceeds will be spent on sport while, in marked distinction, 12 per cent. will go to the Exchequer.

If we are to have a national lottery, the money raised should be divided between sport and other good causes in the proportions that most people expect. It would be a tragedy if—despite the hopes and aspirations not only of the Minister, Conservative Members and my colleagues who have supported the idea of a lottery, but of those who buy tickets—three times as much money from the lottery were to go to the Exchequer than to good causes such as sport. If the Government are serious, let them put their money where their proverbial mouth is.

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by direction of THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS *under Standing Order No. 16 (Time for taking private business), proceedings on the motion lapsed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business).*

British Waterways Bill [Lords] (By Order)

Order for Second Reading read.

7 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

You will recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the last time I spoke when you were in the Chair was during a debate on the Select Committee on the Environment's report on coastal planning and protection. I complained bitterly that, although I was very interested in the subject, my constituency could not be further from the sea and that the nearest I got to it was having the grand union canal run through my constituency. However, this evening, our time has come for a debate on the canal system, and I am delighted to sponsor the Bill.

As a past chairman of the all-party waterways group and a member of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council for many years, I have followed matters affecting the canal system with considerable interest. The Bill tackles many of the problems that have been identified over the years by not only the user groups but the British Waterways Board and the Select Committee on the Environment in its report.

I am delighted to see here colleagues from both parties who have taken a close interest in waterways. I know that canal users and the British Waterways Board greatly welcome the interest and affection that there is in the House for our canal system. It is about 200 years since the legislation that first established the canal system was introduced, so it is not inappropriate that we are now debating a Bill that deals with some of the problems that have arisen in the intervening period.

British Waterways is responsible for 2,000 miles of inland waterways, 1,500 miles of continuous towpaths, 2,100 listed structures and monuments and 64 sites of special scientific interest. The Bill is promoted by British Waterways primarily to secure the additional safety of waterway users and the owners and occupiers of adjoining land, to create new conservation, environmental and recreational duties and to enable British Waterways to generate more income from reinvestment in the waterways.

The non-repair of waterways and associated works at times of emergency gives rise to the risk of serious danger to persons and property. The board believes that there is a need for specific provision granting the right to enter land for such purposes. The power of entry to third-party land to facilitate repair and maintenance was referred to in paragraph 3.29 of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report of May 1987. It drew attention to the fact that British Waterways has no effective statutory rights of access across private property, even in the direst emergency when life and property might be endangered. Paragraph 3.31 of the MMC report states that a general powers Bill would be the appropriate way to correct that deficiency, and that is what we are debating.

The board is unusual among statutory undertakers in having no general powers to enter land. Among the utilities, British Waterways is alone in lacking powers to deal with emergencies that threaten life and property. The National Rivers Authority can effect entry on to premises for the purpose of carrying out its water resources functions and to act without notice in an emergency. In its capacity as a navigation authority, the NRA is in a different position from British Waterways because the natural rivers for which it is mainly responsible—it has a few canals—do not present the same risks.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that a high percentage of canals are on embankments where the real problems lie if overtopping occurs and there is erosion of the embankment or if tree roots penetrate the lining of the canal, leading ultimately to the instability and collapse of the embankment itself. That was the cause of the recent example on the Lancaster canal, which was a worst case scenario.

The breach occurred on the offside, where British Waterways usually owns no property, late on a Friday afternoon—as always seems to be the case. The canal immediately flooded the grounds of adjoining property and threatened houses, including one occupied by a lady of very advanced years. But for the willingness of the landowner to permit British Waterways entry, to fell trees and to provide vehicular access, serious property damage would have ensued. However, in the past, not all landowners have been so accommodating, with resultant risks to public safety.

Of course, the Bill provides for the payment of compensation for loss or damage caused as a result of the exercise of the powers of entry and for the payment of a sum in the nature of a rental. That matter was raised at a recent briefing for hon. Members in the House. Moreover, the board has agreed a code of practice as to how the powers should be exercised.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Why was that provision added later? If it is so important for British Waterways to have these emergency powers, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, why has it taken more than two years—probably longer, since promotion of the Bill was announced—for the provision to be added? Would it not have been good sense to concentrate on that narrow aspect, about which no one disagrees, rather than tie in with it a series of other provisions which have been controversial?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is right to believe that safety is the primary purpose behind the Bill, but many other issues are involved and I shall deal with them in due course. The hon. Gentleman is far more of an expert on private Members' Bills than I am. He will know that they proceed slowly because people take the opportunity to raise matters that are perhaps not strictly relevant to the Bill but they wish to air. That is why it has taken so long.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is the hon. Gentleman going to state that there are five points which the Inland Waterways Association would like to be added to the Bill and which have, I believe, been agreed? I must declare an interest as I am a member of that organisation. Some people who use their craft to seek work have some reservations about the protection afforded. If such matters were covered, I am sure that the Bill would get a fairer wind.

Mr. Jones: I shall deal with that issue. I am trying to go through the Bill in order so that hon. Members can follow my points.

Environmental and recreational duties are close to my heart because they stem from the Select Committee's

recommendations. Clause 23 is included to discharge an obligation, which has been accepted and supported by the Government, that British Waterways should be subject to the same general environmental and recreational duties as the NRA and the privatised water companies. The clause is directly adapted from section 8 of the Water Act 1989 and uses the same language. The Select Committee on the Environment's report on British Waterways, which was published in August 1989, recommended that a duty similar to that under section 8 should be applied to the BWB. The Government endorsed that recommendation in their response of February 1990, and it is now before the House.

Clause 23 has caused some concern among those involved with recreational interests about its precise effect. It maintains the existing equilibrium between the recreational use of waterways and their conservation and environmental value. It has been confirmed to British Waterways in advice from leading counsel that the effect of the clause is to confer additional environmental and recreational duties without diluting its maintenance obligations under the Transport Act 1968, which, in relation to commercial and cruising waterways, are of considerable importance to those with boating interests. I understand that any difficulties that the new provision would cause would in no way go beyond the normal difficulties of making a balanced judgment which many statutory bodies, including British Waterways, have to make on a daily basis.

British Waterways will be required to enhance and to conserve flora, fauna and natural features of special interest and to take equal care to protect and conserve buildings and sites of historic interest. It will also have to have regard to preserving access to towpaths for walkers and others as well as to protecting derelict waterways with potential for future recreational use. I have the Wendover arm in my constituency and I hope that it will once again come into use some time in the next 10 or 20 years.

Those duties are reflected in the new leisure and tourism strategy and environmental policy. The board recognises that towpaths are widely used for different purposes. Some are public footpaths or bridleways and will always maintain that status. The others, with no public rights of way, will continue to be available free of charge for pedestrian use. That is an unequivocal commitment which I give on behalf of British Waterways.

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): The hon. Gentleman has given a very important commitment. However, clause 23(4) states:

> "Nothing in this section shall require recreational facilities made available by the Board to be made available free of charge."

Can the hon. Gentleman give that commitment when the clause does not seem to back him up?

Mr. Jones: It is a matter of whether one looks at it from a lateral or from a linear point of view. The hon. Lady knows canals well because she represents a Birmingham constituency. She will know that some towpaths are wide and some are very narrow. There is no intention of causing any problems for those who want to walk along canals. On other parts of the canal system, such as Gloucester docks with which I am familiar, British Waterways has agreed to areas being cordoned off so that the Inland Waterways Association can have a rally for which it makes a charge. There is no problem about walking along the towpaths free of charge. However, some part of the wider areas might have to be cut off for some purpose or other. I hope that that answers the question.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): There are real concerns about charging for access to towpaths which have been accessible to the public, by and large, since the construction of the canals in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Should there not be a further provision in the Bill? If a dispute arises, not the hon. Gentleman but the Bill will be quoted. There should be a provision in the Bill to give the guarantee that the hon. Gentleman has given.

Mr. Jones: That is difficult to do. I have given a commitment that British Waterways takes as serious and categorical. From the point of view of most of us who like to use the canals for recreational purposes, that seems acceptable. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been to many rallies. He will know about the arrangements to generate funds for the Inland Waterways Association and for the restoration of canals. If the IWA could not charge for such rallies because people had the right to go all the way across a towpath, it would be difficult for it to raise funds. I should not wish that to happen and I do not think that British Waterways wishes that to happen.

Part III contains powers for the safe and effective regulation of the board's waterways in the interests of all users. Part III has aroused opposition from certain boating interests which are anxious to ensure that the new controls are not unduly onerous. As a result of such obligations, a number of amendments will be proposed in Committee, if the Bill is given a Second Reading, to provide safeguards for boat users and for others. The amendments have been agreed with the IWA, the Royal Yachting Association, the Residential Boat Owners Association, the British Marine Industries Federation and the Association of Pleasure Craft Operators.

Part III would impose new minimum fire and safety standards on boats and would prevent pollution. According to Home Office statistics, between 1983 and 1988, there were more than 500 fires on boats on inland waterways; a spectacular example featured recently on BBC television news was of a pleasure boat on the Thames which was completely burnt out. The standards include specifications for engine installations, fuel systems, fire extinguishers, liquid petroleum gas and electrical appliances, ventilation systems and fuel storage. The NRA and the Broads authorities have agreed with British Waterways that there should be a common approach to craft safety. The boat safety standards will, therefore, apply to vessels on the majority of our navigable waterways. That harmonisation is welcome.

Each boat on the waterways will be inspected, as in an MOT test, but normally every four years rather than annually. Existing licence holders would have until at least July 1994 to comply if their boats were built after 1970, or until July 1995 in the case of older vessels. A standards appeals panel is to be set up on which British Waterways will be in a minority. It will include representatives of boat users. The owners of historic and other boats using the waterways may apply for exemption from the standards. Pleasure boats of all ages must be covered by third party insurance and houseboats must have moorings with

[Mr. Jones]

proper facilities. British Waterways estimates that already almost 90 per cent. of private pleasure boats carry third-party insurance.

At present, about 1,000 house boats are illegally moored on waterways. They, too, must have moorings with proper facilities. As a result of the current housing shortage, the board has announced a five-year moratorium on enforcement action which runs until 30 April 1996 on terms that could allow those house boats to remain until fully serviced permanent moorings were found. Following the Bill, houseboat owners will be offered three, five or seven-year agreements modelled on existing legislation for mobile homes which will replace the current annual agreement.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman has listed a series of concessions that have been wrung out of the promoters. He began by saying that the Bill was an urgent safety measure. Why did the promoters not make those concessions in the House of Lords, or why did they not make them when the Bill first came to this House? Because it has taken so long to get the concessions, there is still a great deal of suspicion outside. There is also a belief that if we spin out the procedures, even more concessions will be given. Would it not have been far better for the promoters to meet the objectors at the beginning and do a deal then? I have no doubt that the promoters will have to make more concessions if they want the Bill to be enacted.

Mr. Jones: As I know from some of the points raised with me, it is difficult to pin down some of the objectors to saying what they dislike and what they want. It is only through the process of negotiation and consultation that these matters emerge. I appreciate that it is a lengthy process which has costs in terms of the matters about which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) cares. However, that lengthy process has resulted in a far greater awareness of the problems perceived by some of the groups who have objected. Those problems were not always terribly clear when they were first raised.

New permanent mooring sites are being identified and discussions are well advanced with local planning authorities. Some 92 residential moorings, both British Waterways and private, have been granted planning permission and are in various stages of development and occupation. More planning applications are expected shortly. A planning application will be made shortly for a site in Birmingham for 42 boats. Those registered are being allowed to remain on temporary moorings while the permanent sites are being developed, and most stay where they are.

I emphasise that nothing in the Bill alters the general rule that boats are free to moor against a towpath in any one place for up to 14 days except where that would cause a navigational hazard. Restrictions are necessary in the interests of securing safety and preventing congestion. They will apply only at permanent mooring sites, at water points and at certain popular sites which have special conditions, such as time limits to be fair to all users. Those will be clearly signposted.

Part IV contains provisions to extinguish unexercisable fishing rights, and rights found in old canal Acts to construct works and to provide facilities which have not been exercised since the Acts were passed up to 200 years or more ago. The rights include rights to construct roads, railways, branch canals and other works, as well as fishing, sporting and boating rights. Those rights were created to compensate those whose land was severed and to facilitate the commercial exploitation of the canals by freight traffic.

Any modern claims to exercise those rights are for wholly different purposes and are inappropriate in modern conditions. The rights concerned are, by definition, obsolete, and attempts to exercise them can cause the board genuine difficulty in efficiently managing its operation. It is important to emphasise that the Bill provides for compensation to be paid to the owner of an extinguished right. If there is any dispute about compensation, the Lands Tribunal will arbitrate.

Quite a number of those who petitioned against the Bill made a point about bridges and the opportunity to join two pieces of land separated by a canal. I can understand that point, and British Waterways has agreed to drop the word "bridges" from the Bill to overcome that difficulty. However, as they are heritage structures, I hope that any bridges built over a canal will be in keeping with the heritage structures and that those who wish to take advantage of the opportunity will not in any way diminish our heritage.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): My hon. Friend will be aware that some people challenge the contention that the rights are extinguished; indeed, they may be challenged in court. My main concern was about bridging and I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for the concession that he has announced and the amendment which will presumably be tabled in Committee. However, rights do not just have to be exercised over canals. In some cases—for example in relation to drainage—pipes may be required to go under a canal. On the same terms, will my hon. Friend make the same concession and therefore satisfy my lingering and remaining doubts about the Bill?

Mr. Jones: I do not see any problems with that, provided that whatever went under a canal in terms of drainage did not interfere with the canal itself—for example, by causing fracturing. Otherwise, my hon. Friend's point would not cause any difficulties, and I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks.

The majority of the 44 petitions deposited in the House were concerned about the proposals embodied in clause 27. Extensive discussions have taken place and a number have been withdrawn. Perhaps more will be withdrawn as a result of my comments this evening. On behalf of British Waterways, I invite the outstanding petitioners to submit their cases to the Committee where the issues can be debated and deliberated on.

The Bill will also give British Waterways powers for the acquisition by agreement in relation to the development of land. That should generate income over and above the grants payable by central Government and help to develop the network for leisure activities and enjoyment.

At earlier briefing meetings with British Waterways, some hon. Members voiced concern at what they described as the hidden agenda behind these powers. There seems to be a fear that the powers are a precursor to privatisation and will facilitate the sale of the most lucrative British Waterways assets before privatisation. That is untrue, as the Government have made clear on many occasions, including, to my knowledge, before the Select Committee on the Environment when we considered the matter.

For the foreseeable future, our canals and waterways will depend on considerable Exchequer support. However, that does not mean that there is no potential for British Waterways to raise additional resources from disposing of redundant assets. It is worth emphasising that, over the past five years, the selective sale of properties with no operational use and not required to protect the environment or heritage, has yielded £27·4 million. Reinvestment on the waterways over the same period totalled £28·4 million.

British Waterways is committed to ensuring that the disposal of any land or buildings surplus to requirements results in developments that will complement and enhance the waterways. Clause 23 effectively imposes such requirements on British Waterways. There are many examples around the country of new developments alongside our waterways, such as Gloucester docks, which positively enhance and encourage the use of our waterways. I do not know whether the gas street basin is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short), but I visited it when the Select Committee considered the subject, and I was very impressed by the obvious recreational pleasure derived by the local residents there.

Finally, British Waterways has recently been through a period of major change, with management being devolved from the centre to its regions and waterways. Considerable effort has been expended by British Waterways throughout the promotion of the Bill to reassure its users that those changes were for the better and much has been achieved through the publication of statements of intent about British Waterways' future polices and commitment to consultation. In particular, in January 1992, British Waterways published in the form of a customer charter, a document entitled "Caring for our Customers" which explained what the public could expect in terms of the spread and quality of services.

The charter included an internal complaints procedure involving successively the waterway and regional managers and then the board's chief executive. It committed British Waterways to the principle of an independent external review in appropriate cases where complaints have not been satisfactorily resolved through the internal machinery.

Mr. Cryer: I hope that the charter is a help. However, we are unfortunately dealing with legislation. The hon. Gentleman said "finally" as though he were approaching the end of his speech. Will he consider clause 13 which, in relation to houseboats, gives the board absolute power to provide

"such further general terms as they think fit, in addition to or in substitution for those set out in the said Schedule 1"?

A charter may be all very well, but it has absolutely no statutory force. In effect, we are giving British Waterways the power to produce statutory terms and conditions. However, such powers were clearly defined in the Transport and Works Act 1992 in terms of delegated powers to Ministers. As I recall, every aspect of that Act is subject to statutory instruments under the negative or affirmative procedures. Should there not be that kind of parliamentary accountability when many thousands of houseboat owners are affected and not this absolute power which is being given to British Waterways?

Mr. Jones: I was explaining about the code of practice. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by my comments about an ombudsman and his powers. British Waterways has developed proposals in consultation with the Department of the Environment to establish a non-statutory waterways ombudsman to investigate complaints of maladministration by the board, which will be bound by his or her recommendations. That is more than can be said in local government or in relation to the reports of other ombudsmen. I am pleased to say that the appointment of the waterways ombudsman, which will be endorsed by the Secretary of State, will be announced shortly and will thereafter take immediate effect.

We all have a great affection for the canal system, and I hope that the Bill will enhance it for many years to come.

7.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): It may be convenient for the House if I intervene at this stage to give the Government's view of the Bill. First, I should say how much I welcome the opportunity to have a debate on our inland waterways. They are part of the glory of our islands and we are committed to their fullest possible development, for the widest possible range of leisure and recreation activities, as a precious environmental and heritage asset. That commitment is demonstrated by the continuing payment of Government grant to British Waterways totalling £50 million a year and by the record level of investment in waterways maintenance in recent years.

Most objective observers would agree that the waterway network is now in a better condition than it has been for many years. Indeed, this month sees the publication of the 250th issue of that excellent journal, *Waterways World*, in which the editor, Hugh Potter, reflects on the 21 years during which *Waterways World* has been published. Looking at the achievements of the past 21 years, he says:

"In 1972, the restoration of the Kennet and Avon was just a dream; the Huddersfield and Rochdale canals were impossibilities. We now have the Kennet and Avon open and the trans-Pennine canals well on their way to full restoration. The Caldon and Basingstoke canals, the Great Ouse and the Upper Avon have all been reopened. How many boaters navigating those waterways today have the slightest idea how fortunate they are? They are experiencing 200 years of history, but if it had not been for the remarkable events of the last 21 years then boaters might not have had those waterways to give them such pleasure today."

Much has been achieved in recent times. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) has said, 1993 is a particularly joyous year for canals in Great Britain as it marks the 200th anniversary of the passing of the first enabling Acts allowing for canal construction in this country.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): The Minister rightly quotes from *Waterways World* the achievements of those canal restoration schemes. However, all those schemes, like the Barnsley canal restoration scheme in my area, have received no support from the Government. The restoration schemes were left to small groups of volunteers who fought hard over many years to bring into being the idea of restoring some of the famous waterways, so it is wrong for the Minister implicitly to claim credit on behalf of the Government for the achievements mentioned in that magazine.

Mr. Baldry: Over the years, the Government have made considerable sums of money available to the British Waterways Board, and we continue to do that. As I said, we have given £50 million in grant aid. I readily pay tribute to the thousands of volunteers up and down the country who have helped to restore our canals and waterways. The Kennet and Avon and many other canals and waterways that have come back into use have done so as a result of the considerable work done by those volunteers. I hope that that interest will continue because their involvement in the waterways is much appreciated and much valued by the British Waterways Board and by hon. Members.

The British Waterways Board is at the forefront of the events celebrating two centuries of canal life, especially the weekend of "Canals 200" festivities across the country next weekend when a large number of organisations will take part. The Royal Mail is also celebrating our canal heritage by issuing a set of commemorative stamps in July. Looking around the Chamber today, I think that most hon. Members have a waterway or canal interest in their constituency, including the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston): the Oxford canal runs through my constituency.

We have considered the contents of this private Member's Bill and, in principle, have no objections to its proposals. They are consistent with the board's existing statutory responsibilities. The powers that the board is seeking are designed to improve the safety of its waterways and allow BW to manage its assets more effectively and efficiently. The proposals are aligned to British Waterways' integrated business strategy, which was endorsed by the Government and, indeed, welcomed by the Select Committee on the Environment in 1989.

The strategy provides for the development of the board's property assets in partnership with the private sector as an integral part of BW's waterway management. Increased income from property development can be ploughed into waterway improvements to the benefit of all waterway users. The strategy has allowed BW to reinvest some £28 million in the waterways over the past five years. Sixty per cent. of BW's operating and maintenance costs are currently paid for by the taxpayer through Government grants totalling some £50 million a year. British Waterways' boating customers directly contribute less than 12 per cent. of those costs. Against that background, we are encouraging British Waterways to broaden its customer base and increase revenues from those who benefit from the waterways. Given the level of taxpayer support invested in British Waterways, we are also pressing the board to improve its efficiency and cut running costs.

The board's proposals in the Bill—to be given powers of emergency access over third party land, as discussed in the 1987 report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, and improve the management of its assets—are consistent with a drive for greater efficiency. If enacted, the Bill will generally speaking leave the board in a similar position to other statutory undertakers.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I thank the Minister for giving way on that point. Recently, there were two breaches on the Lancashire stretch of the Leeds to Liverpool canal and there was considerable difficulty with access. The matter of access is urgent because, obviously, breaches cannot be dealt with quickly if people do not have access. That part of the Bill must be welcomed so that BW can deal with such problems speedily.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point—I am sure that it will be supported by all hon. Members who take a common sense approach to the Bill.

I understand that concern has been expressed about the Bill representing some sort of hidden agenda for privatising British Waterways. I must make this absolutely clear: I assure the House that the Government have no plans to privatise the British Waterways Board, nor are there proposals to phase out Government subsidy. We recognise that the heritage, educational and environmental value of waterways merits continuing substantial support from the taxpayer.

Ms Clare Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Baldry: I shall give way in a moment.

I know that other concerns about the Bill in the past have been raised by the Inland Waterways Association and other organisations. It is for the Bill's promoter, British Waterways, to satisfy the House that the powers that the BW board proposes to take are justified. Recently, it has made considerable efforts to meet objectives and respond to objections. It is not without significance that there is not one mention of the Bill in the current issue of *Waterways World*. If there had been continuing concern from boat owners, boat operators and others with interests, I would expect that concern to be reflected in current publications relating to waterway interests.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I assure the Minister that people are still writing in with a great deal of concern. A lot of concern has been expressed in publications relating to waterways in the past 18 months. I should like an undertaking from the Minister that the Government will keep their promise and not privatise the whole waterways network. If they encourage Inland Waterways to sell a particular section which might be profitable or too expensive to keep in terms of a canal, that would break up either the existing network or the potential for the future of the network. Can we have an assurance that there is no intention to fragment the waterways by selling parts of them?

Mr. Baldry: I readily give that undertaking. British Waterways has a statutory definition as to what is a waterway and we have no intention of reconsidering that definition. As I said, we are committed to British Waterways and to maintaining the waterways network in the United Kingdom.

Ms Short: Many peope are concerned about the danger that the Government may privatise British Waterways. I listened carefully to what the Minister said. He said that the Government have no plans so to do. Before the election, the Government told us that they had no plans to increase value added tax, but we know what has happened in relation to domestic fuel. We know that the Government are planning to privatise the forests and railways in Britain, so I am sorry to say that I am a little suspicious about what the Minister said. Will he give us an absolute commitment that in the lifetime of this Government there will be no move whatever to privatise any part of British Waterways?

Mr. Baldry: The proposal to privatise or take powers with regard to British Rail, British Coal and other industries was a clear manifesto commitment which the Government are properly honouring. All that I am saying is that the Government have no intention, in this Parliament or any subsequent Parliament—so far as I am aware—of privatising any part or the whole of British Waterways.

I should mention the proposals in clause 23 on the board's general environmental and recreational duties. That clause has the Government's full approval as it fulfills our commitment to the Select Committee on the Environment to extend to BW the environmental and recreational duties for water companies and the National Rivers Authority in section 8 of the Water Act 1989. As a public body, BW is already under a general duty to have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside. Clause 23 clarifies that duty in accordance with the wishes of the Select Committee and is framed along the same lines as the provision in the Water Act 1989. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) stressed that the clause does not undermine the board's maintenance obligations under the Transport Act 1968.

While the Government believe that generally the Bill contains a sensible set of proposals, I recognise that not all of them are non-controversial. The Bill received extensive consideration in another place in the last Parliament, and I understand that negotiations on outstanding concerns have continued. That has been evidenced today by a number of the concessions that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Cryer: The Minister referred to the general principle of the Bill. The powers in the Bill enable the British Waterways Board to delete the whole of schedule 1 and substitute its own terms and conditions. If the Bill is passed in its present form, we shall be allowing the British Waterways Board to legislate. We shall be allowing it to alter the terms of primary legislation passed by the House. Surely the Minister cannot agree to that sort of thing. The House takes a keen interest when Ministers seek what are known as Henry VIII clauses. Surely we should not allow outside bodies to have such powers.

Mr. Baldry: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the Bill is one that I would share. It must be for the House to decide whether the powers that the promoters of the Bill seek to take are justified. My concern and that of the Government in relation to a private Bill is to ensure that nothing in the Bill conflicts with the general principles of Government policy or public policy, and there is no such conflict in this case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West mentioned some amendments to part III of the Bill which have been agreed with a consortium of boating organisations, including the Inland Waterways Association and the British Marine Industries Federation. As a member of the IWA, I welcome that agreement, both in itself and as a sign of a co-operative spirit between the boating organisations and the British Waterways Board. I have already touched on the need to increase public awareness of the value of our inland waterways and to broaden the customer base of BW's waterways in order to secure its long-term future. That is a challenge for both BW and its customer organisations. A constructive dialogue between the two is to be welcomed.

I know that in the past concerns have been expressed about the way in which British Waterways liaises with its customers. It is for BW management to ensure that adequate arrangements are in place for consulting waterway users and dealing with complaints. It has already put a great deal of effort into improving customer relations and has recently examined how complaints could be more effectively handled. Early in 1992, the board introduced a formal complaints procedure and gave a commitment to the appointment of an independent ombudsman. His or her role would be to look into cases of complaints against BW and decide whether they were dealt with fairly and reasonably.

I am delighted today to welcome the creation of that post, which will come into effect as soon as possible. I see that positive development as yet another successful example of the principles of the citizens charter in action, building on the Government's determination to improve quality of service in the public sector.

It must, of course, be for BW as the Bill's promoter, to persuade the House that the powers that it proposes to take are justified. The Committee which will consider the Bill will be in a better position than we are in this debate to consider points of detail—it is clear that there are several points of detail to be dealt with—and to hear expert evidence on them. I hope, therefore, that the Bill will be given a Second Reading and allowed to proceed to Committee for more detailed consideration.

7.42 pm

Ms Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): People throughout Britain are increasingly conscious of the enormous value to their quality of life of Britain's canal system. Until not so many years ago, people read about the importance of the canals in the development of the industrial revolution. They often saw them as dirty old waterways somewhere in the middle of their city. Although boat and barge owners always treasured the canals, in the general popular consciousness the canals were perhaps not as valued as they might have been.

That position is changing remarkably. Certainly in my city, people are beginning to see the enormous value of canals in cities that do not have many rivers. They realise the value of waterways and walkways and the possibility of having pleasure in boats, by walking or cycling along the canal, and so on. There has been a great shift in the value attached to the canal system. People realise that it improves the quality of life in our cities, especially where there is no other access to water. That is the context in which we should consider the Bill.

We should regard our waterways as national treasures to be nurtured and cared for so that they can give pleasure to the present generation and future generations. Given the costs of transportation, perhaps we shall look to the canal system to transport heavy goods again; we now pollute our countryside by trundling massive lorries up and down our motorways. I should not be surprised if in future years the canals were used increasingly for transportation as well as for pleasure.

I am sure that many hon. Members share my experience of the Bill. My first real knowledge of it came from increasing numbers of letters from people who know and care for the waterways. They were desperately worried

[Ms Clare Short]

about the detailed provisions of the Bill. People who lived, worked and played on the canal were worried that their rights would be undermined by the Bill.

As I read those letters, I shared the anxiety expressed in them. I thought that many of the objections were reasonable. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, the Bill was first introduced in our second Chamber, as I like to call it. The second Chamber has done an excellent job on the Bill. If I may digress, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a system such as ours, in which power is so concentrated in the Executive, there is a strong case for a second Chamber. That has been demonstrated in the work that it has done on the Bill. It is just a pity that it is not elected.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said, enormous concessions and changes have been made as a result of the work put in by the second Chamber. It is a great pity that the Bill was introduced in such an unacceptable form. All sorts of fears and reasonable alarms were created. The Bill has been massively modified. British Waterways would have been better advised to consult more broadly before it introduced the Bill.

I am sure that everyone present has read the proceedings of the Select Committee of the House of Lords. It is impressive to see in our democracy ordinary citizens petitioning and making objections and the promoters of the Bill making major concessions because those objections are reasonable. I should like to think that the Government, who so nakedly fail to listen to any objection, however reasonable, might learn a little from the reasonable nature of that process.

The Bill that we are considering is much better and much less objectionable than the original Bill. The Labour party had three major fears about the original Bill which were summarised in a briefing prepared by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and circulated to all Labour Members. I can do no better than to quote the paragraph that summarised our concerns. It said:

"Labour has three prime concerns about the Bill: first, that the British Waterways Board may cease being custodians of part of our national heritage and instead become more a property selling and developing agency; second, that the Bill contains a number of impositions on boat owners, some legitimate but some fairly arbitrary; and third, that the Bill might allow the Board to charge for recreation and access to the canal system."

Major concessions have been made on all three points.

With regard to our fear that the Bill might turn the British Waterways Board into a property development agency, we are reassured that the environmental duties imposed on the board have been strengthened. The board has dropped subsection (5) of clause 23, which made it clear that the strengthened environmental duties were unenforceable, so the Bill is much more acceptable and stronger in terms of environmental protection, which would come before any commercial motive. Therefore, that provides real reassurance on that important matter.

I am grateful to the Minister for what he said about any possibility of privatising the waterways. The terms in which he summarised the position the second time were unequivocal. He made it clear that he had no plans to seek to privatise any part of the British waterways in the lifetime of this Parliament. We are all grateful for that, because the fears were real.

It is clear that the environmental duties laid out in clause 25 restrict the board in any proposals that it might have to act as a property developer. The amendment promised in paragraph 45 of the House of Lords Select Committee report on remaining waterways that might have potential use strengthens that undertaking even further, so waterways that are not in use now but might be brought into use are also protected by that general environmental undertaking. That is good.

I mentioned another subject in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones). Clause 23(4) states:

"Nothing in this section shall require recreational facilities made available by the Board to be made available free of charge."

I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said on behalf of British Waterways. He gave an unequivocal undertaking that there will be no charge for using towpaths, to which people now have access. I understood his undertaking, which was quite clear.

The hon. Gentleman also said that there might well be developments alongside waterways and canals, from which it may be possible to raise funds to be used to clean up pollution. No one is opposed to that. I am worried that the presure being applied by the Government on British Waterways might cause BW to have to raise funds to meet more and more of the costs. The Minister said that more of the costs of waterways should be raised in funds.

I do not think that British Waterways would be self motivated, but, despite the undertakings given by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West, I believe that over the years there may be increasing pressure on British Waterways, especially as the Government may reduce the money allocated to support the waterways. British Waterways will be under growing pressure to charge for the use of waterways. I understand the undertaking given by the hon. Gentleman, who I am sure made it sincerely on behalf of British Waterways. However, given the Government's attitude to obtaining commercial returns from the waterways and given what the Minister said earlier, I am still not satisfied that unreasonable charges will not be imposed on people who now take their use of the waterways for granted.

Mr. Baldry: It may be helpful if I clarify how the Government understand that part of the Bill. As I suspect the hon. Lady may know, for more than 30 years British Waterways has had the ability under section 43 of the Transport Act 1962 to charge for any recreational facilities that it provides, but it has not charged for access to towpaths. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) made clear on behalf of British Waterways—he gave an undertaking to the House—it has no intention of doing so.

The Bill is not designed to increase British Waterways' commercial assets. It does nothing and adds nothing to the powers of charging which the board already has. It merely clarifies that any facilities that BW provides under the clause need not be free of charge. If the board incurs costs in providing facilities for organised sports events on land, it should be able to recover a contribution from those who benefit. It is very much in that context that the Government understand that part of the Bill.

Ms Short: I hear what the Minister says. We all agree that it is wholly reasonable to charge for some activities that take place on the waterways in order to raise funds and use the money to clean up pollution and carry out necessary work. However, I remain concerned, and I think that the matter must be discussed in Committee and further undertakings must be sought from BW. I am worried that the pressure exerted by the Government on BW to cover more and more of its costs will inevitably lead to charging people for walking on towpaths that they have used throughout history. I understand the undertakings, but they have not been made in the Bill, and I remain concerned about that.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The hon. Lady mentioned cycling, and the pleasure affforded to those using the canal towpaths. British Waterways recently stopped charging for permits. If BW were under the sort of pressure described by the hon. Lady, the reverse would be the case. British Waterways has first to consider the practical aspects. There is no way that a system for charging for the use of towpaths for walking could be introduced. It benefits the canal system if many people use the towpaths. Many of the reports of damage and potential danger come from members of the public, as I know because I have a long length of the Grand Union canal in my constituency.

Ms Short: The hon. Gentleman pooh-poohs my fears, but I heard what the Minister said. As I recall it, he said that the Government gave a subsidy or allocation of about £50 million a year to the waterways. I also recall that he said that about 10 per cent. of the costs of boat users were raised in fees——

Mr. Baldry: Boat users contribute 12 per cent. of the costs of British Waterways.

Ms Short: I am grateful to the Minister—the figure is 12 per cent. I am worried by those two figures. The Minister also said—and I think that it is in the framework of law—that British Waterways is required to make a commercial return as often as it can. The logic of that is that it will seek to make more and more charges. We all agree that charges for some additional services would be reasonable, but I remain worried that that might lead to charging for basic uses of the waterways. I hope that more undertakings will be given in Committee.

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that a charge is no longer made for a general bicycle permit. Many people, certainly those on the canals around Greater Manchester, are concerned that there is competition between walkers, horse riders—riding horses on towpaths is a traditional activity—and cyclists—who have been using the towpaths for at least 70 years. Earlier this century, cycling was an important means of getting from the locks. There is considerable wear and tear on the towpaths. It has been suggested that one way to ration the use of towpaths would be to insist on permits for cyclists and horse riders and, possibly, on a charge for walkers. I realise that it is difficult to maintain towpaths for those three activities. I hope that my hon. Friend will seek assurances that there is no intention to circumvent that rationing or sharing policy by imposing charges.

Ms. Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who elaborates the general worries that I am trying to describe. I am sure that he will seek his own assurances. I am not certain that we shall obtain any more assurances today than those we have been given by the Minister and the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West. The Committee that discusses the Bill should return to the subject and table amendments to protect people's right to enjoy the canals.

I said that there were three reasons why the Labour party originally had doubts about the Bill. The first related to the drive to privatise or make commercial development the Bill's overwhelming purpose. Protection against those moves is afforded by the strength of clause 23 and relevant amendments. We have discussed the possibility of charges; I have stated that I do not believe there is strong enough protection and I hope that the Committee will return to the subject. The third reason for our doubts involves the impositions on boat owners.

There is absolutely no doubt that major concessions and changes have been made to the Bill due to the very reasonable objections and petitions of boat owners and those who live in boats. Those fears have been considered in our second Chamber. However, I have a letter from the Residential Boat Owners Association which was passed to me by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. I noticed that he was honorary president of the association, so I thought that I should take the letter seriously.

It seems to summarise the remaining concerns of residential boat owners. We all know that they have been very concerned, and that many negotiations have taken place and many concessions have been made. The letter summarises the association's three remaining concerns. It states that its first concern relates to clause 13(1) and schedule 1. The letter states that the provisions lay down that

"the Board would have the right to terminate a houseboat certificate if 'the houseboat or any equipment is having a detrimental effect on the amenities of the locality on the site.' This clause is the same as in the Mobile Homes Act, and in the Mobile Homes Survey (1992) published by the Department of the Environment it was shown that this provision is open to subjective judgment and therefore to abuse. It would be better to write any regulations about the condition of a residential boat and its mooring into the local mooring agreement rather than fix it in statute."

I hope that we will get an answer to that point from the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West.

The association's second anxiety has to do with clause 15, which is about penalties. The association suggests that the board already has enough penalty-making powers and does not need more. It suggests consolidation of existing legislation. The same point was made in the House of Lords Select Committee report. We hope for an answer from the Bill's sponsor.

The third concern of the association is that it would like to amend section 8 of the British Waterways Act 1983 to permit the owners of boats seized by the board to have immediate access to their possessions on the boats. I understand that that provision had been removed or softened, but I hope that the sponsor will be able to give me an assurance on that——

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To respond to the hon. Lady's point about dangerous or deleterious houseboats: I understand that the Department of the Environment is reviewing the relevant part of the mobile homes legislation because it has not worked terribly well in practice. I am happy to add that the BWB is looking into that and is in negotiation with the association whose concerns the hon. Lady has read out to try to resolve the matter amicably.

Ms Short: I am grateful for that. It still leaves the two other points. Perhaps if I give the hon. Gentleman a copy of the association's letter he may be able to help us further. For people who live on boats, this is a serious matter because all their property can be seized. I had understood that the danger had now diminished, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman can fill us in on that later.

My final point is to be found in paragraph 54 of the Select Committee's report. It has to do with the relationship between the BWB and those who live on and enjoy boats. The report says that that relationship has been poor, and that consultation and complaints procedures have been poor. I am glad of the progress represented by the commitment to an ombudsman. If he or she is to have the power to make binding arbitration, he or she will be much more powerful than, say, the local government ombudsman. I know of a frustrating case in which the latter ruled against a local councillor, but there has been a refusal to implement the ruling.

We expect more problems in this area, even with the best will in the world. There are 20,000 boats on our canal system, 2,000 of them with no moorings. We want people to enjoy their boats, but the chances are that more and more of them will want to mess around in boats. More and more people in our estuaries have nowhere to moor their boats, and they are beginning to interfere with the wildlife. Given that increasing ownership, there will have to be some regulation to protect the quality of our canals. Similarly, although there are 169 authorised houseboats, we know that there are another 1,000 that are unauthorised—a serious problem. Clearly, we need permanent, good moorings for people who want to live in their boats.

The BWB has made some major concessions to allow those with no authorised moorings a longer time in which to acquire authorised moorings. I am still worried that the BWB may not give undertakings to all who register in the hope of getting moorings that they will be certain of acquiring them. Under the Bill, it remains possible that some people who have lived in boats for a long time will not be offered permanent moorings after the transitional period. There is certainly no absolute assurance of that.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: May I offer the hon. Lady a personal observation? I have dealt with the BWB throughout the 10 years I have been in the House. At first, I thought that it was awful and unresponsive. It is still not perfect—none of us is—but the improvement over the years has been immense. I am happy to pay tribute to the local staff of the BWB for their responsiveness now.

Ms Short: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; what he says is good. When I first came to the House 10 years ago —it sometimes feels longer—I used to receive a lot of letters about trivial matters that troubled people living on boats—disputes that should have been resolvable without involving a Member of Parliament. There has indeed been a considerable improvement. I maintain, however, that the possibilities for conflict, if everyone is not guaranteed a mooring, are great. We need fair consultative procedures so that boat users can agree certain standards. Then, if certain irresponsible owners will not comply, they will know that the standards have been reasonably arrived at.

John Stuart Mill said in his lovely little book "On Liberty" that we will truly know that we live in a free society when there are plenty of eccentrics living in it. During the past 15 years or so, perhaps we have got rid of some of our eccentrics—but some of them remain, living on, caring for and loving their boats. It is important that each of them has the right to complain and to be protected. British Waterways will find that it can deal with some of the awkward customers more easily if it has first consulted the majority of boat users and implemented standards with their support.

Many of our initial concerns have been met. I have outlined the remaining ones, which I hope will be satisfied by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West and in Committee.

8.6 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I claim to be one of the eccentrics who takes an active interest in boats, who owns a boat and who spends a lot of time with them.

I speak for the Inland Waterways Association in this debate, and I am chairman of the parliamentary waterways group, which position I took over from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones). The IWA has negotiated with the BWB for many months; there has been a great deal of toing and froing between the two bodies. The IWA has also fully consulted its members.

The IWA supports in principle three items in the Bill: the emergency powers of entry, the standards of construction and insurance, and houseboat regulation. It agrees with these items for safety reasons.

Some people who live along the edge of canals are still worried, however, about the emergency powers of entry. I hope that the BWB will use them only in extremis, when banks have burst and so on. My hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) has asked me particularly to mention this matter, as some of his constituents who live right on the canals are worried about the powers being used too arbitrarily. I hope that the board will bear that in mind.

The IWA has received a number of commitments from the board, and they are on record, but the association is worried that they might not necessarily be incorporated in the Bill. So I am here to make sure that they are put on record in the debate.

Five points are material: first, the powers to prevent mooring and to refuse to license boats on the grounds that a mooring is unsuitable—this refers to clauses 17, 18 and 20 in part III. There have been some negotiations on this, and I hope that the promises that have been made will be honoured. The Wooden Canal Craft Trust, another boating organisation, is particularly worried on this score.

I understand that clause 25, which deals with powers to dispose of property and subsidiaries, is to be deleted. I welcome that, but seek reassurance that it is to be deleted. The omission of the Inland Waterways Association from the boat standards appeal panel is causing concern. That panel will examine boat standards, and it is right that there should be a meeting of minds of those who run the waterways, those who use them and boat owners so that some principles are established for boat standards.

Those who enforce standards can be stroppy and difficult, and that is a deterrent to some boat owners whose vessels, although beautiful, are old. They were built at a time when the rules were not as stringent as they are now,

and it is as well to bear that in mind when examining boat standards. The IWA would like to be on the panel and explain those anxieties.

Clauses 28, 29 and 30 deal with the power to reduce the rights of commercial shipping in docks. We have been given promises about those clauses and want to see them amended. There are to be powers to limit the opening hours of locks on the Severn. It is odd that British Waterways is moving in that direction, when the authority for the Thames is trying to find ways to keep the locks open longer. It is considering electronic equipment so that a licensed boat owner can insert a card in a slot to switch on the electricity and work the lock. Shorter opening hours will deter boating, and I am concerned about that.

Clause 32 will delete from the Severn Navigation Act 1842 the rights on the opening of locks. The clause that seems to be causing most concern is clause 27. Much time was spent on that in the House of Lords, especially debating the rights of those who have ownership rights along a canal. In the Act that created the grand junction canal 200 years ago this year, great consideration was given to the rights of people who lived anywhere near it. It stated:

"Canal may be made through Mrs. Seare's Pleasure Grounds under certain Restrictions. No Lock to be erected within a Mile of Mrs. Seare's Land at Bulbourne without her Consent. No Injury to be done to the Mills of the Hon. Mrs. Leigh."

That Act of 1793 in the reign of George III took great care over people's rights, and I am concerned that clause 27 will work against such rights. The Country Landowners Association and the National Farmers Union have now agreed with British Waterways about examining clause 27 but the IWA is still concerned about rights.

One of the purposes of the clause is to raise more revenue for the BWB. That has been mentioned in the debate, and it is in line with the plan produced by the Department of the Environment in 1989. Perhaps the clause should not be in a Private Member's Bill; if people's rights are to be rescinded, that should be done in a public Bill.

As I have said, the IWA is concerned about some parts of the Bill. Many concerns have been allayed because the Bill's promoter and the BWB have been helpful in every respect. I know that their intentions are honourable and that they are trying to improve the system and to assist those who use the waterways and those who live alongside them. I hope that the concerns I have mentioned will be considered by the BWB before it makes its final decision.

8.13 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): In this debate, I speak as a constituency Member and not as a party representative. My involvement in the issue arises from being the Member of Parliament for the Caledonian canal, which connects the lochs forming the basic part of the Great Glen which gashes across Scotland. The major loch, Loch Ness, contains my well-known constituent, the monster. I hope that there are no suggestions that the monster should be in any way licensed because that would be resisted, not least by the gentleman himself.

Ms Short: Is the hon. Gentleman sure that it is not a she?

Sir Russell Johnston: Although the monster has been seen, it has never been heard, and therefore it cannot be female. I say that with due deference to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Ms Short: That is uncharacteristically ungracious of the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he might like to reconsider his remarks. I invite him to do so.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am sorry if I offended the hon. Lady. I had no intention of offending anybody.

The most remarkable thing about the exercise that has brought the Bill to the House is the amount of mistrust among many waterway users of the good will of the board. That has been most noticeable. It is significant that not one of the hundreds of letters that I receive every week has argued that I should vote for the Bill—apart from letters from the BWB. I am speaking not just about last week but about the time since the exercise started. That was not always so and I am not clear about how the change came about.

The hon. Members for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) said that things have got a bit better than they were 10 years ago. When I entered the House nearly 30 years ago, things were quite good. The last time that I had substantial dealings with the board was in the early 1970s when the Laggan locks on the Caledonian canal gave way, leading to the canal becoming blocked. We had much help from the then Minister, now Lord Howell, and there was general good will.

Some hon. Members may recollect Sir Frank Price, who was a chippie sort of chap. He was the chairman of the board and engaged in many consultations. I am not sure how much account he took of those consultations, but he was often to be seen. Over the next decade, there was silence, which I mistakenly assumed to be benign. No one wrote to me to say that the BWB was behaving badly, so I presumed that it was not and followed the generally sound political principle of letting sleeping dogs lie.

However, perhaps it was also germane that the BWB, which until then had maintained regular contact by way of meetings at least annually, also reduced its level of contact. Whatever the reasons and in the case of the Caledonian canal—I cannot speak for the rest of the system—part of the reduction must have arisen from managerial centralisation, which removed decisive, responsible people. One such person was Brian Davenport, a rather fiery chap who was in charge of the Caledonian canal when I entered Parliament. One could contact him quickly and easily. However, control passed to Glasgow; although Glasgow was not far away in one sense, in another it was quite a distance, and I do not mean simply in terms of miles.

Whatever the reason, the relationship declined and quietly and insidiously soured. I am sure that the present chairman, David Engman, whom I have met three times, is seeking to repair the situation that he has inherited, but I fear that that which is desired has yet entirely to be achieved. Mistrust certainly runs deep, and although much progress has been made in alleviating concerns, many remain.

To put it in a nutshell, British Waterways portrays the Bill as being about safety and environmental improvement

[Sir Russell Johnston]

and many of the punters think that it is about more money for the board and more impositions on them. That fear may or may not be justified.

The hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West, who made a fair speech when he introduced the Bill, dwelt for some time on the problems of access. I do not deny that there can be problems, but I do not think that there is a significant general cause for concern. An interesting, almost amusing, exchange of letters passed across my desk —at the end of last month, so it is quite up to date. It was about a long dispute that one of my constituents, Mr. David Stevenson, has been having with British Waterways about land ownership in Gairlochy, which is at one end of the Caledonian canal.

It would be inappropriate to go into too much detail, but I shall quote a letter from British Waterways' solicitor who says, inter alia—all lawyers say that, and this chap certainly writes a good lawyer's letter—

"it seems that the dispute has been escalated by his"—

that is Mr. Stevenson's—

"removing and replacing of the padlock on the gate to a roadway which he and the Board use for access purposes and which runs across the land which is the subject of the dispute. Previously, each of the parties had held keys to the padlock, which is a position we wish to revert to pending the outcome of investigation."

In his letter, Mr. Stevenson says:

"Mr. Duffy states the dispute has been escalated by me . . .This is simply not true. One of their customers smashed the gate and despite being pressed by letter on numerous occasions British Waterways declined or refused to have it repaired. Highland Regional Council . . .insisted that the gate be kept shut and supervised in the interest of safety. Therefore I had no alternative but to repair the gate and provide a lock. One of the Waterways supervisors has been provided with a key".

There we have two contradictory statements on a relatively minor matter. The hon. Member for Ladywood said that when she first became a Member of Parliament she received quite a number of letters dealing with smallish matters that should not have reached a Member of Parliament. However, that was an interesting exchange.

I know Mr. Stevenson well and he is an honest man. I do not believe that he would write lies. There is a general lack of confidence in what the board does. The Minister has been categorical, in response to points made by the hon. Member for Ladywood, in denying that there was any hidden agenda on privatisation. However, many people think there is a hidden agenda only if it is one of more regulations and more cost being laid upon them. They are not sure of the board.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made the good point that many of the advantages listed by the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West were slowly extracted from the board over a long time, and not all in the House of Lords. From my first involvement in this exercise, I found that difficult to understand.

The hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant), who is chairman of the parliamentary group, went through the views of the Inland Waterways Association. Its most recent letter refers to the ombudsman. I am not sure what powers this man—or woman: I beg the pardon of the hon. Member for Ladywood—this person may have, or the terms of reference under which he will operate. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West implied that that would be done, and soon. That is to be welcomed.

There is some division between at least one of the houseboat organisations and the IWA. Many people live in houseboats, of which I think that there are 6,000 or 7,000. Some, as the hon. Member for Reading, West said, are not new vessels. Inevitably, those who live on them fear that they may be subject to regulations that do not bear directly on safety.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman raises a point that I raised with the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones). Clause 13(2) gives absolute powers to British Waterways to produce

"further general terms as they think fit"

to apply to houseboat certificates. It is a matter of concern that it can simply wave to one side a whole schedule and substitute its own. That worries houseboat owners.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman is quite right and that bears directly on the trust that I mentioned earlier. One may be prepared to give many powers to someone on whom one can rely to exercise them in a reasonable, fair and trustworthy manner. I am not saying that British Waterways is not, but there is no doubt that many people are suspicious.

The original Bill did not recognise the existence of a separate Scottish legal system, which reflected rather badly on British Waterways. I gather that such changes as it is introducing have now been sent off for approval by the Scottish Office. However, I am not clear as to what powers British Waterways is claiming in respect of lochs. The Caledonian canal is a linking, not a continous, canal, which joins the different lochs. I do not know whether the board wants to impose licensing within lochs and has been told that section 43 of the Transport Act 1962, to which the Minister referred, would enable that to happen. I shcuild like to be assured on that matter.

Time is not on our side. I do not wish to detain the House for long. I have expressed my major concerns and I am still not convinced of the urgency of the Bill. I accept that there has been progress and improvements have been made. It was significant that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West praised the improvements more than anything in the original proposition. I remain of the opinion that the Bill can be improved by further discussion. It would also have been better if the Bill could be introduced in a better atmosphere. Many of the things that have been said about what the board is doing concern only what the board has done since last year. They are not embedded in the structure. Therefore, I am still minded to vote against the Bill.

8.27 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I speak for two principal reasons. The first and foremost is that my constituency lies at the intersection of two major waterways—the River Severn and the Worcester and Birmingham canal. That canal is the only thing that links me with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). It is right that I pay tribute to what British Waterways has done recently on that canal. There was major expenditure—perhaps overdue—on a project to dredge a section of the canal at Lowesmoor, and some important repair works at Diglis.

The river and the canal are important as resources for tourism, sporting facilities and recreational activities. As a

major narrowboat operator uses the canal, I feel that it is right to welcome the support that the board has given to a new promotional campaign to encourage the use of narrowboats for holidays. I also look forward with excitement to the time when the board's important plans to develop the Diglis canal basin come to fruition, providing a major fillip to the regeneration of my constituency.

The second reason why I support the Bill—here I have one eye on the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), although I have no pecuniary interest to declare—is that I have long taken an interest in marine issues, and have worked close with the British Marine Industries Federation. I want to inform the House of the federation's welcome for the general terms of the Bill, but also to express its single reservation.

I can now say that if it comes to the vote I shall support Second Reading. The federation is generally happy with the balance that the Bill now strikes, although there still needs to be careful scrutiny in Committee. Of its four parts, 39 clauses and three schedules, clause 27 still causes real concern. It is important to remember that boating interests have always supported the concept of the Bill, but they have had serious worries about some of the additional issues raised by the inclusion, without consultation, of certain provisions in the Bill.

I agree with many hon. Members who have spoken that, sadly, British Waterways does not always enjoy a reputation for a sympathetic approach to uts users. I suspect that that stems from the fact that it is not just a navigational authority, but a landlord. It has a monopoly position when negotiating with existing clubs and trade operators. It probably needs to make much more effort to foster a relationship of trust with those users, in the interests of our inland waterways system.

The Bill, although good and important in many ways, originally raised a number of concerns, but all those have now been satisfactorily dealt with bar one. We did not always think that that would be the case; it has been achieved by a process of hard negotiation. It has resulted in a happier position and a better Bill. We now have the undertakings and the statement of intent that we have always sought.

The users never set out to be petty or unreasonable in the concessions that they sought. They have always been aware of the costs involved and have been anxious not to cause undue expense to British Waterways, and therefore the taxpayer. We can only wish that there had been consultation before certain objectionable measures were included in the Bill. However, as I have said, there now remains only one outstanding concern, and that is clause 27.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) said, the history of canal construction is complex. Each required a canal Act to enable it to be constructed, which meant different concessions for each landowner. My hon. Friend cited some of those. The clause would cancel those historic rights—such as the right to construct wharves, slipways, cuts and moorings for boats. The problem has been exacerbated by the lack of trust felt by many small entrepreneurs on the canal system towards British Waterways. It has to be said—and I understand it—that the British Waterways estates department justifiably has a remit to maximise profit, but that often leads to feelings of intimidation among small operators.

It is not surprising that there is still concern about the clause because it will affect not only the majority of freehold canal operators but all future ones. I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) that it is profoundly un-Tory to cancel the rights of lords of the manor in such a cavalier way. Those rights permitted canalside landowners to establish their businesses by constructing facilities and using the canal in the course of their business. That ensured that the canal owner could not operate as a monopoly. Again, I look at the hon. Member for Bradford, South and see in clause 27 the shades of railway privatisation debates to come.

In recent times, ignorance of those rights, coupled with British Waterways' erosion of them, has resulted in exactly the unreasonable and coercive behaviour that the rights—some 200 years old—were designed to prevent. It is important to realise that, unlike British Waterways lessees, freehold businesses have no legal protection, such as is provided by the Landlord and Tenant Act or by arbitration.

We have heard tonight that an ombudsman will be established for the British Waterways board and its customers. That is a welcome development. In Committee, we may decide that the establishment of an ombudsman will provide sufficient reassurance about the extinguishment of the rights contained in clause 27. I hope that that proves to be so.

However, at present no ombudsman exists for the canal operator who feels that he is under duress from British Waterways. His rights under the enabling Acts offer the only security upon which he can rely. British Waterways is now seeking to extinguish even those rights. Until some alternative legislation or ombudsman is in place, those rights should not only remain but should be revitalised and given greater recognition through the Bill.

Modern-day businesses do not object to paying their way and contributing to British Waterways, providing that that contribution is fair and reasonable. British Waterways offered evidence to the Select Committee in another place on its reasons for wishing to extinguish those rights. Amendments will probably be tabled in Committee to satisfy those concerns while also giving comfort to the freehold businesses that they will be allowed to operate on the canals. I support most of the Bill's provisions. I hope that my concerns about clause 27 will be dealt with in Committee, perhaps through the establishment of an ombudsman or by some other method. I urge the House to support Second Reading.

8.36 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I speak as an inland waterways enthusiast and someone who has fallen into the Leeds and Liverpool canal at Foulridge and also in the River Calder, and it is not a particularly pleasant experience.

I declare an interest as a riparian owner. That sounds very posh, but as anyone who has seen my back garden can testify—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney)—that is not the case. I live at the side of the River Calder and I want the river to be fostered, developed and improved—as I believe it can be. There is tremendous potential on our rivers and inland waterways, both in west Yorkshire and elsewhere.

I am a founder member of the West Riding Narrowboat Co-operative, which celebrated 10 years of

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

existence only a few weeks ago. It is a tremendous example of collectivism in action. The co-operative has gone from strength to strength in owning boats and operating them on the inland waterways of both England and Wales. Therefore, I have been both a user and an enthusiastic supporter of inland waterways for many years and can take a user's perspective of the Bill.

I have supported the efforts in West Yorkshire to restore particular canals, such as the Barnsley canal which is partly in my constituency. I commend the efforts made in West Yorkshire and elsewhere. As the Minister said when he quoted from *Waterways World*, great strides have been made to restore neglected and abandoned waterways.

I am aware that initially there was strong opposition to some of the Bill's provisions. In particular, there was concern about the implications for various users not just of the waterways, but of facilities in the general vicinity such as towpaths. Cyclists, walkers and those who enjoy fishing have been concerned about the probable effects of clause 27. Many of those concerns were expressed in another place and Members from all parties have received numerous letters of concern. In particular, boat owners are concerned about the increased cost implications of insurance, safety and standards of boats that will be required under the Bill.

I would not argue against improving safety or environmental standards—I have seen pollution. I spent a holiday on a hired boat in the constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), and I was appalled to see a hire base pumping raw sewage from hire boats directly into the canal that connects the two locks. I hope that that practice has long since ended. I raised that matter when the water privatisation Bill was passing through the House.

Many boat owners are concerned about the way in which, over the last eight years in particular, the cost of renting land and water has dramatically spiralled. In my constituency, owning a boat is not necessarily the preserve of the better-off. A number of my constituents are pensioners who are not particularly wealthy, but who spent many years' savings purchasing a small narrowboat or motor cruiser. They find that the cost of continuing a hobby to which they look forward in their retirement is excessive.

Many community groups also use the waterways. The West Riding Narrowboat Co-operative was originally formed by purchasing a boat owned by a group that offered intermediate treatment to youngsters on the edge of offending. There are many examples in West Yorkshire and elsewhere of people from deprived backgrounds, the physically handicapped, and others with different problems gaining tremendous personal benefit from holidays, weekends or even day trips on the inland waterways. We should not forget the important role played by such groups when considering legislation such as the Bill.

My constituents advise me that the cost of a cruising licence for the Aire and Calder can be anything between £300 and £350 per year, per vessel. Mooring costs can be anything between £350 and £600 depending on the length of the craft. It is possible for boat owners and users on the Aire and Calder to pay £1,000 annually before they set foot on the water—I mean, set out on a journey in their boat.

My constituents emphasise that they are receiving fewer and fewer services for that increased cost. They do not see that additional income being reinvested in improving the waterways in that area. The contrary is true. More and more work is being put out to private tender, with the involvement of non-experts in the highly skilled work of maintaining inland waterways.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend refers to a fear that has been expressed to me by canal users—that the old lengthman is disappearing. He was a skilled man who knew the canal and was able to take remedial action before anything drastic occurred. That occupation is dying out. There is now extensive use of private contractors who often do not have the expertise and background to do the work. They do a pretty poor job, and then more money must be spent later to remedy defects. Many canal users are expressing concern about the deterioration in maintenance standards, yet the Bill gives the British Waterways Board the power to prevent moorings at points that it considers unsuitable, perhaps because of that very lack of maintenance.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend is right. There are many examples in West Yorkshire of the deskilling of the waterways. I know a number of people who have worked on the inland waterways for many years. The skills, expertise and experience that they have acquired are such that they can anticipate problems—they do not have to be told what the problems will be. When we lose those people, they will be gone for ever. Private contractors are no substitute if they do not have the background to do a proper job.

I concede that a number of the original objections to the Bill have been met by the board during the Bill's progress through another place. Nevertheless, I emphasise that a number of serious concerns remain, and they have been raised today by hon. Members in all parts of the House. They must be addressed today or when the Bill goes into Committee.

Clause 23 states that the board shall

"have regard to the desirability of preserving for the public any freedom of access to towing paths and open land and especially to places of natural beauty".

The Bill does not clearly state that fees for access to towpaths will not be permitted by the legislation. Although the Minister and the promoter have given reassurances, it is unsatisfactory that they are not written into the Bill at this late stage.

There are real fears that access will be restricted. We saw that happen with the water privatisation legislation, which restricts access to areas of open country, including in Yorkshire, where the public were once free to walk, exercise and enjoy the fresh air of the countryside. We are seeing also the re-emergence of battles over access to open moorland that I thought had been won in the 1930s.

Private owners are increasingly restricting ramblers from free access to areas that walkers have used for generations. The area between my home and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), on the other side of the Pennines, is at the centre of one such argument. The Derbyshire border has been the

subject of campaigns over many years. It worries me that, at some future date, the public will have to pay for the basic right to walk along inland waterways towpaths.

As to clause 25, I listened carefully to the Minister's remarks concerning privatisation, but having seen what has happened to the waterways over the past decade or so, I believe that commercial obligations on the BWB will increasingly take precedence over its waterways responsibilities. We have seen already the pressure from the Exchequer to reduce the money that the board receives from central funding, which led to huge increases in the costs to users of the waterways. That has also placed pressure on the BWB to consider new ways of raising money, other than by doing the job that it was established to do.

Despite the Minister's categorical assurance today, I believe that privatisation will be the next step and that the Bill is a thinly disguised paving measure. I hope that I am wrong, but given the Government's record, and the direction of almost every measure that they have introduced, I see no reason to believe that privatisation will not be the end result. I suspect that I shall be proved right.

It is clearly the Government's intention to commercialise the BWB even further, to enable it to pull out even more from state funding of the inland waterways system. That saddens me, but it comes as no surprise. Even more worrying is the fact that the Government have no coherent political strategy for the use of our inland waterways, and the immense potential offered by our rivers and canals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) referred to the transport potential; in my part of West Yorkshire, that potential is immense —or would be, if people would take the trouble to sit down and think it out. Of course, the process is slower, but there is not necessarily any need to rush: different cargoes require different time scales. I am saddened by the increasing movement of goods from rail, canal and river to road, which is merely building up a huge environmental problem for the future.

There is also an economic potential. Tourism, for instance, has hardly been mentioned. My area, like others, was an industrial area until the Government came to office. We used to have coal mines, but we no longer see coal being transported on the canals; thanks to the Government, we now have industrial museums. All the same, waterways tourism has huge potential in such areas as west Yorkshire, if only the Government would recognise it. I am thinking of the restoration of canals such as the Huddersfield narrow, the Rochdale and the Barnsley.

A few years ago, the Inland Waterways Association carried out research into how much people spend when travelling through areas such as mine on boats. It found that they spend money in shops, supermarkets, restaurants and public houses. People help such areas by investing in them. I believe that I shall live to see the real achievement of the Pennine ring in the next 10 or 20 years—the achievement of a ring of waterways that will enable people to spend a fortnight travelling through the south and the north Pennines. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the finest part of Britain. It is about time more people had the privilege of viewing it from the local waterways.

British waterways have an immense amount to offer. It saddens me that the Bill does not address the real political challenge.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Many of the actions to which the hon. Gentleman refers happen all the time, without requiring the powers in the Bill. For instance, the money that has gone into the Aire and Calder in Leeds—a splendid development, in my view—was invested as a result of the "corridor studies" that the British Waterways Board has promoted precisely because it recognises the leisure potential involved. I am keen on such investment in my constituency: the Grand Union canal has a good deal of leisure potential, and there has been considerable co-operation between the BWB and local authorities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said earlier. Although I should like to be able to support the Bill, I am afraid that I cannot do so, for the simple reason that I have grave suspicions. I fear that the hidden agenda will prove profoundly unhealthy from the point of view of those who believe deeply in the potential of the waterways.

8.53 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). He implied that his constituents occasionally tried to walk on water; he also confessed that, on occasion, he had got rather closer to our inland waterways than he had intended.

I, too, am keen to protect the interests of those who live, work and take their leisure on the waterways. When I served on a London borough council in a riparian area, I sought to protect the interests of houseboat owners on the Thames; I find that the same issues crop up now that I represent a different riparian borough. I was pleased to hear some of the points raised today, including the assurances given by my hon. Friend the Minister. As hon. Members have pointed out, the British Waterways Board has made a number of concessions—both while the Bill was in another place, and while the House of Commons was consulting.

Like others, I especially welcome the steps towards greater safety, environmental improvements and the river-worthiness of vessels. Ultimately, lives are at stake —both those of boat owners and those of the people with whom they may come into contact—and I am thankful for the requirement for third party insurance.

I hope that the Minister can confirm my understanding of the position, which has gone a long way towards resolving the problem that led me to put my name to the blocking motion. I feel that, broadly speaking, the inclusion of that requirement in the Bill should be sufficient. My hon. Friend suggested that 90 per cent. of boat owners now have insurance, and I do not think that any hon. Member would think it unreasonable for the other 10 per cent. to acquire it. After all, if an accident occurs, there must be a cost to others, including the boat owners themselves; if a boat sinks, there will be the cost of clearing it.

Why have such people not already taken out insurance? Perhaps they have not thought about it; perhaps they considered it unnecessary, because they have not been required to insure so far. Perhaps they had difficulty in obtaining insurance. There's the rub; such difficulties can arise for a number of reasons. Perhaps boat owners have had problems in shopping around; that is the suggestion of the British Waterways Board.

Perhaps the boat in question is not deemed a good insurance risk—that is where I start to have my worries

[Mr. John Bowis]

—or perhaps the owner is not considered a fit and proper person by the underwriters, who are therefore reluctant to insure the boat under that ownership.

Sir Russell Johnston: There is another, more straightforward, reason: the owners may consider it too expensive in relation to what they perceive as a low risk.

Mr. Bowis: That may well be the reason why they have not taken out insurance in the past, but I suggest that it is right that they should be required to do so in future. What must concern us is the extent to which British Waterways should involve itself in the search for or the provision of that insurance underwriting.

I have raised the subject because I am concerned that British Waterways should not interfere or involve itself with the insurance market, given that there are already enough brokers and underwriters to provide insurance for anybody who should be on the waterways. Of course, someone who should not be on the waterways will not be able to obtain insurance, and the obtainability of insurance will to some extent provide a guide to whether a craft and its owner are right and proper users of the waterways and constitute no risk to others.

In response to my concerns and those of my constituents, British Waterways has done its best to reassure me on the subject. It has clearly said that its concern is only with the older boats, which might be driven off the waterways if they could not obtain insurance. I do not think that that is right. Older boats may cost more to insure, but insurance will be available if the risk is reasonable. Older boats in respect of which insurance is not available should perhaps be kept as museum pieces and taken off the water so as not to place those using them, or other people, at risk.

I do not believe that most older boats will come into that category. I know of houseboats on the Thames dating back to the Dunkirk crossing which are perfectly adequately maintained and insured. It should be possible to obtain insurance for most boats of whatever age.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman is placing a great deal of faith in the insurance companies' ability to make an assessment. He is referring largely to narrowboats on canals. I know of a case in an area of activity much more important than that, in which an insurance inspector did not know the difference between steel and cast iron, and overlooked very important risks as a result. The idea that insurance companies are absolute assurers of risk is often not borne out in practice.

Mr. Bowis: From time to time, new risks may arise, and it may be difficult to find an expert who can give the right insurance advice. But that is not an issue under the Bill.

My only question concerns the extent to which British Waterways should be involved in insurance. I am anxious that, wherever possible, it should leave such matters to the experts and should neither set up an insurance scheme of its own nor make recommendations as between different insurers. British Waterways has told me clearly:

"we have no ambitions whatsoever to enter the insurance market".

No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) will be able to confirm that that is the case. As I understand it, British Waterways merely seeks to compile a list of underwriters—and I hope brokers, because brokers often have schemes; I am glad to see my hon. Friend nodding at this point—who offer third party insurance policies, and to make it available on request.

That is much more reasonable than what was originally implied, which was that there might be a scheme—a proposal about which many in the insurance world were concerned. If someone is having difficulty finding insurance, he should first be asked, "Have you looked in the boating and canal publications?", as those publications contain many advertisements for insurance. If people have tried that and still cannot obtain insurance, perhaps a list could be sent to them as a last resort.

I wanted to put on record British Waterways' assurance that it is not interested in entering the insurance market with its own scheme or in pushing one policy as opposed to another—in other words, that it does not have plans to interfere with the insurance market. That assurance having been given—again, my hon. Friend has been nodding as I have listed the requirements——

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I can make it clear that the board's intention is to provide information, which I think is only reasonable. I do not think that anyone has put up a case against compulsory third party insurance, for obvious reasons, but not everyone knows who precisely offers such cover, and to that extent the provision will be advantageous.

Mr. Bowis: That basic information makes for a meeting of minds.

I am very much in favour of the insurance requirement, which is to the benefit of everyone operating on our waterways. On the basis of that and the assurances I have been given, I am prepared to withdraw my objection to the progress of the Bill, and to support its advance into Committee.

9.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I should like to give a little history lesson to the House about my constituency. Ellesmere Port was named after the town of Ellesmere in Shropshire as a result of the canal links that joined the two towns. The canals, of course, then joined the network in the midlands, going through Wolverhampton—which still has a link with my constituency through the name of one of my wards—to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short). The network is extensive. At the confluence of the narrow canal, where it meets the Mersey ship canal, is the Ellesmere Port boat museum, which I hope that many hon. Members will take the trouble to visit. I believe that the Minister has already visited it, although I am not sure whether he paid his full entry fee. I will collect it from him on the way out if he did not.

The museum is a centre of national excellence, where pieces of Britain's heritage have been put together to form an important collection of vessels, which, had British Waterways had its way at an earlier stage, would have run the risk of being destroyed and lost to our museum. The collection includes vessels that were horse-drawn, steel and wooden, as well as sailing vessels connected with the Mersey, and steam vessels from both the canal and river network. It also includes an important complex of

buildings, which have been preserved by the efforts of a large voluntary network of organisations, without whom Britain would have lost a great deal.

Paragraphs 18 and 19 of the special report of the House of Lords mentions the proposed panel, to which reference has been made. Paragraph 19 starts:

"Fifth, petitioners expressed concern about historic craft."

I want to concentrate specifically on historic craft.

It has been put to me by organisations such as the Wooden Canal Craft Trust—to which the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) referred—that there are probably a further 200-plus vessels of potential historic importance located on the sides of canals, which, if not taken into account by a proper amendment to the Bill, could be lost to our heritage. Often, those vessels appear to the uninitiated like a pile of planks, old wooden hulks, but often such pieces of timber reflect important parts of our heritage.

It always strikes me when I see the crowds of people walking across the flagstones in Westminster Hall, and looking at the places where various people were laid in state, that the wonderful craftsmanship in the hall is often forgotten, particularly that of the ceiling where great carpentry skills are exhibited.

Many of the hulks are lying by the waterside and are submerged. The fact that they are submerged actually preserves them. The idea of somebody getting a crane and hoiking them out of the water, and leaving them on the canalside or towing them away, is sacrilege. They need to be carefully preserved.

In the 1970s, when I lived on the south coast, I watched with great interest the work to raise the Mary Rose from the seabed of the Solent. That task took immense skill, great chemical knowledge and knowledge of preservation techniques, many of which are still in development. It would be wrong to allow such craft to be lost to our heritage by raising them and then leaving them at the canal side.

Reference has been made to boats that may not meet standards laid down by regulation. As an experienced boat user, I would argue strongly for improved standards of maintenance and stricter controls for environmental and safety reasons in the construction and use of vessels, whether on canals, rivers or the open sea. Recently, there have been serious accidents when the maintenance of the vessels involved was not taken into account. We should adopt the principles that were applied when the MOT certificate for cars was first introduced. It is important that vessels built before a predetermined date should not be subject to any of the proposed changes. The final sentence of paragraph 19 of the House of Lords report states:

"One petitioner responded by saying that historic craft should be exempted as of right, and not at the Board's discretion."

I whole-heartedly agree, because the board is not the proper determining body for matters of national heritage.

It has been said that insurance should be a criterion. A number of Conservative Members who are experts in these matters could perhaps advise us, but I suspect that it would be extremely difficult to obtain a fire risk policy on this building, and the same could be said of many vessels, certainly those built before the turn of the century. I understand the argument that vessels which are in use need third party liability cover but one can take the issue to ridiculous extremes. The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) said that vessels which did not meet certain standards should be removed from the canals and placed in a museum. That reflects badly on his views on the place of historic vessels.

Mr. Bowis: We are talking about third party insurance, not insurance to preserve or protect ancient craft. We would not allow a veteran or vintage car to travel on the roads without such insurance, so it is reasonable to require vessels of whatever age to have the same cover because there is a risk to other people.

Mr. Miller: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and, of course, such matters must be taken into account. I hope that he will extend his expertise and ensure that every member of the Wooden Canal Craft Trust can receive proper insurance cover through his expert knowledge. I am sure that they would be glad to do so at a proper, not inflated, price. However, I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

The central issue is whether British Waterways should decide matters of national heritage. We have heard that vessels that were built without an after-rail would fall foul of the regulations.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The intention is not that the BWB decides the definition of a historic boat, but that the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council should do so. It comprises people who represent different interests and it is widely acknowledged to be an extremely skilful and expert body on inland waterways which should draw up the criteria. That may meet with the hon. Gentleman's approval. I remember attending an enjoyable meeting of the IWAAC in his constituency.

Mr. Miller: I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman has visited my constituency——

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Was he canvassing?

Mr. Miller: —as long as he was not canvassing. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) has beaten me to it.

The hon. Gentleman's point is set out in paragraph 18. The panel does not comprise only the board. However, the paragraph does not spell out precisely the make up of the panel. It says of the board:

"It proposed that the panel should consist of two Board appointees plus representatives of IWAAC, the Royal Yachting Association and the British Marine Industries Federation. Some petitioners argued that the panel should include representatives of houseboat owners and persons with practical experience of wooden craft."

Mr. Robert B. Jones *rose*——

Mr. Miller: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is about to tell me that such people would be in a majority.

Mr. Jones: There are two different points. One is about the criteria for historic boats and the other is about appeals when boat standards are not up to scratch. I made it clear that the BWB would be in a minority on the panel for the latter. There are two different points.

Mr. Miller: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. However, paragraph 19 says:

"Applications for exemptions will be subject to the appeals procedure described in paragraph 18."

That brings us back to the panel. I accept that the BWB would potentially be a minority on the panel, but I am not

[Mr. Miller]

satisfied that the Bill contains a requirement for a necessary level of expertise and historical knowledge about old vessels to be incorporated into the panel.

It would be wrong not to ensure that every effort is made to keep such vessels not only in good condition, but in good working order and in use on the canals. The boats could help to preserve parts of the canal network through the nature of their use—a different type of use from the use of modern boats and of the pleasure craft currently in vogue. Old craft are an important part of our heritage. My single reservation is that the board has not gone far enough and that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) has not gone far enough. The panel does not go far enough in ensuring that the need to protect our national heritage of boats is met.

9.18 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for missing the initial debate on sport. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) suggested that I was in a tired and emotional state. I was in a tired and emotional state, but that was not why I missed the debate on sport. I had to deal with a pressing family matter involving someone who was seriously ill. I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the victory yesterday of your home team, Featherstone. I hope that next year, we can welcome you to Central Park, after which you will leave in a tired and emotional state.

In the last Parliament, I was one of those involved in the blocking motion in respect of the initial attempt that British Waterways made to introduce the Bill. Once one becomes involved in a blocking motion, it is rather like a parliamentary squeeze of the goolies. Once one is involved in such a motion, discussions take place and, by a hard press or a tweak of the blocking motion, there can at least be a closing of minds in respect of some of the issues on which there were previously disagreements in relation to the Bill's sponsors or the organisation involved.

From the outset, when I was involved in the blocking motion, I made it clear to anyone who wished to listen that I was a strong supporter of British Waterways, and have been so for historical and political reasons. For most of my childhood, I lived 25 yards from the towpath of the Forth and Clyde canal. Indeed, I spent much of my formative years in that canal and was usually dragged out by my mother. I spent my holidays on the towpath of the Monklands canal, which unfortunately has been filled in and is now the M8 which divides Glasgow north and south, east and west.

I represent Makerfield, through the centre of which runs the Leeds and Liverpool canal. I was a member of the development committee for the Wigan pier development which involved British Waterways, the local authority and other organisations. They brought together resources and talents to deal with a once derelict site which, three years ago, became the European tourist attraction of the year.

I want to have a close working relationship with British Waterways and to understand the reasons for the Bill. Perhaps tonight we should have been debating a Government Bill on how we can best develop—and not simply protect—British Waterways, both the organisation itself and what it stands for.

British Waterways is one of the nation's greatest heritages and tributes. The waterways are one of the most wonderful opportunities which the nation gives up at its peril. For decades, we have failed as a nation to invest appropriately in our waterways or to give the resources to the British Waterways Board to enhance the development of our waterways.

Over the past 10 years, the Government have increasingly put pressure on British Waterways to find the meagre resources that it already gets from the Government from other sources. British Waterways is between a stone and hard surface. On the one hand, it must, and quite rightly so, enhance the waterways for the reasons that have been outlined, but on the other, it does not have the financial resources to do that.

I blocked the Bill in the previous Parliament for several major reasons, one of which related to the environment and a need for British Waterways and the legislation to set out clearly a concept for wildlife and heritage and a plan that would protect, enhance and develop the wildlife and heritage associated with the waterways. The 2,000 miles of British waterways should be part of a linear national park.

The inappropriate sale of assets that took place a number of years ago—some of those sales were highly controversial—took place when the original Bill was introduced. For that reason, many hon. Members believed that the Bill then was no more than a fig leaf to cover the introduction of privatisation. The British Waterways Board handled that situation appallingly badly in relation to the timing and political explanations.

The board, in its panic to get rid of some of its priceless assets, undermined its credibility in the House and with the users of the inland waterways. Many of the board's efforts since then, both inside and outside this place, have been directed at repairing that damage. It has gone a long way towards achieving that. However, let us be frank about it: much of the pressure for the changes which have occurred resulted from blocking motions supported by hon. Members working with groups outside the House.

Funding is important. If we accept the concept that British Waterways should develop the wildlife, the heritage, the tourism, the transportation to which my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield referred and the employment opportunities for those who work in BW—there is an opportunity for BW to open derelict and unused buildings and land for alternative uses to develop employment in constituencies such as mind—we must examine funding and resources for that development. It was not clear that the previous Bill was simply at attempt to milk the users of canals for the short-term underfunding by the Department of the Environment, with no resources available for the long-term development of the canal system. Therefore, we look forward to receiving assurances that additional resources will be part and parcel of the development of the canal system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield raised the matter of unemployment. Unemployment is important for two reasons—the need to protect employment opportunities for those who work for British Waterways and the need to ensure that responsibility for the core skilled work force remains part and parcel of its overall duties. When the original Bill was introduced, some of us were deeply worried that many of the skilled work force would continue to be replaced through compulsory competitive tendering.

I am not opposed to ensuring that British Waterways gets value for money from its staff—just as the unions are not. However, we want to ensure that the Bill is not used as a trojan horse—a vehicle for removing large parts of the core skilled work force. Perhaps the sponsors of the Bill can tell the House whether the agreements reached some months ago between management and the trade unions on employment rights and the nature of the core skilled work force will remain in force if the Bill goes on the statute book.

I am concerned that British Waterways does not have a true conception of what is required to be done in co-operation with local authorities, other groups in the private sector and the voluntary sector to bring into use derelict land and buildings for a whole series of employment and tourist initiatives, and the need to have added value for its work.

Many vested interests oppose the Bill, such as marina development companies and people with an interest in maintaining a low income from their activities. I do not support those vested interests because I sincerely believe that, if British Waterways is to flourish and develop the sort of strategy that I have outlined, we need to ensure that BW gets part of the added-value income from the development of a canal system. It would be an outrage if we were to force on BW a development strategy involving the use of derelict land and buildings and if the profits from that exercise went to organisations outside BW. To make up the shortfall, British Waterways would attack in financial terms many of the people to which my hon. Friends the Member for Wakefield and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) referred.

We are looking for a partnership on the Bill. There must be an arrangement whereby everyone involved, except those vested interests to which I referred, clearly knows that the resources that are taken from the use of the canal system are pumped back into its development, providing employment opportunities, improving the environment and protecting the wildlife and heritage along the 2,000 miles of system as it stands at present.

I am sure that the Bill will be given its Second Reading tonight, but in getting its Second Reading, I hope that its supporters do not underestimate those of us who have objected to it but have some concessions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood said, we want significant improvements to be made when it goes into Committee. We want British Waterways to make genuine attempts to deal with outstanding issues which have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening.

We also want British Waterways to give some commitments about the sale of assets and to say exactly how they understand it. What are its proposals for its portfolio of land, buildings and other assets? Does it intend each of its regions to draw up a transparent business and development plan? Such a plan should be a public document into which organisations in each region can have an input. I do not suggest that British Waterways should have to give away all its business intentions, but it must give a commitment to public accountability in the development of its core business activities and its strategy to deal with under-utilised land and buildings.

The communities in each region must be involved in developing plans in the same way as local people are involved in the development of local authorities' heritage and wildlife proposals and unitary development plans. It is the same concept. It is well understood by the public. If British Waterways integrated such a concept into its development and business plans, many of the doubts that people express about its intentions would disappear because people would be part and parcel of the development of British Waterways as both a business and a protector of the nation's 2,000 linear miles of inland waterway and canal.

Employment opportunities are vital to Members of Parliament who represent constituencies through which canals pass that have large under-utilised hinterlands attached to them. In my constituency, large areas within the confines of the Leeds and Liverpool canal system could be used to create employment, enhance the activities along the canal and renovate derelict land. The activities of British Waterways, local authorities and private sector developers could be married up to ensure that many of the areas that I represent have a development plan for the next few years so that people can see the way ahead to creating new employment opportunities associated with businesses along the canal corridor.

British Waterways should also be involved in activities in the local community. Appropriate derelict sites could be made available for housing developments. Far too often in the past, developments on the waterside have been at the behest of those with the financial resources to use the environment as part of their back garden. I do not include my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield in that—I have been in his back garden.

I utter a word of caution. In the sale of assets that will surely follow enactment of the Bill, I do not want to see in my constituency developments of housing in areas that are outwith the reach of my constituents, whether it is private or voluntary sector housing. British Waterways should link with local authorities and housing associations to ensure that housing developments provide low-cost housing so that the local community has access to it. It should not merely provide added value for yuppies with weekend condominiums in my constituency, who use their postal vote to vote against me in elections and have no concern for the rest of the community outside the holiday period. I want some clear commitments from British Waterways on such issues.

In the discussions that I have had with British Waterways at regional and national level, its representatives have been nothing other than honest and above board in their dealings. I have no reason to believe that they have ever made any commitments that they do not intend to keep. However, I want to ensure that the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) gives a commitment that the Bill benefits not just the British Waterways Board, but its employees.

9.36 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I have no complaint about the fact that we are debating inland waterways today, but I believe that it is probably a futile debate. I do not see how the Bill can proceed further through the House. The first requirement of the Standing Committee that will examine the Bill will be to satisfy itself that the Bill's objectives cannot be achieved in any other way. Since the last Parliament passed the legislation on transport and works, the Bill could now proceed in a different way.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

I know that the understanding was that private Bills before the House before that piece of legislation was introduced should be allowed to continue their passage, but the British Waterways Bill has been lying around for a long time and should not be allowed to proceed. I hope that the Committee's first action will be vigorously to examine the Bill. I hope that it will conclude that the Bill must be thrown out because it falls outwith the Standing Orders of the House, in that it can be promoted through legislation other than a private Bill.

If we are to proceed with it, the House must insist that the concessions given today and in writing by the board are contained in the Bill. I was always told that I should never trust a statement by a Minister when debating a Bill, as Ministers could come and go, and if I wanted to be safe I should ensure that commitments were written into the legislation.

On the subject of private legislation, I was told that an undertaking given by a promoter was as good as an amendment to the Bill. However, I have had a bitter experience, as an undertaking given during the passage of the Bill to set up the Manchester metro—that my constituents would not suffer a fares increase—was not observed. When challenged, those representing Manchester metro argued that they had not given the undertaking, which was given by the original promoter, and that the two were separate organisations. When the Committee studies the Bill, it is important that any concessions should be written into it.

Why is the Bill necessary? We are told that there are two vital safety matters—one involving people at the side of the canal and one involving boats. I find that suggestion amazing. From 1947, when inland waterways were nationalised, until the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report, no one appears to have encountered the problem of not being able to carry out necessary work in the event of possible flooding. We were given the example of the recent flooding of the Lancaster canal, but we were not told of any problems in obtaining access. The landowner sensibly allowed workmen on to the land to carry out the remedial work to protect the property.

As I understand it, there is not one example of people being denied access. It is important to ensure that access is available for people to make the canal safe and to stop further flooding, but that has not posed a practical problem. If it had, why was a narrow Bill not introduced as soon as that problem occurred in order to solve it? That argument is an excuse for the Bill's other provisions.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am not sure about access being refused, but I certainly know of examples of people having to pay through the nose because some rather greedy landowners saw an emergency as an opportunity to extract large sums of money. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that is not satisfactory.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that people should not extract greedy sums, but not everyone agrees about what "greedy" means. Changing the law is not necessarily the best way to deal with the problem.

Then there is the question of the safety of boats, and especially of third party insurance. We have heard no real horror stories to suggest why that needed to be dealt with urgently. It has certainly not been established by the leisurely fashion in which negotiations on the relevant part of the Bill have taken place.

I want to concentrate on the problems of towpaths and the rights of way along them. Unfortunately, there is a hotch-potch of provision. When they came to register footpaths and bridleways, some local authorities took the view that there was no need to include towpaths along canals in the definitive maps, because they were part of the national heritage so there was no need to record them. Other local authorities did record them. The results often depended on voluntary bodies. In any event, some towpaths and bridleways, and the public rights of way along them, have been recorded, and others have not.

People outside are worried that they may lose the right to go along towpaths. I know that certain undertakings have been given—that there will be no charging or restriction of access along towpaths, although this may not apply in certain dockland areas. I should like that written into the Bill.

A conflict of interests is involved. Fishermen use canal towpaths near my constituency; other people walk along the towpaths; boating communities, some of whose members use bikes to travel along towpaths, are also involved; others again need to use towpaths to get their boats through locks. The interests of horse riders and mountain bikers must also be taken into consideration. Balancing all these interests is difficult, and I should like to be sure that rationing towpath use as between the various groups will be done without introducing charges. I hope that words to that effect will be included in the legislation before it goes any further.

Several hon. Members have referred to historic boats, and two of my constituents are very worried about this aspect. In negotiations, it took a long time to extract any undertakings, and the Bill's promoters could go further to reassure these people.

I was pleased to hear the Minister's categorical assurance that the Government will not push privatisation, but I remain a little worried that the BWB might sell off bits of its land, particularly on sections of the canal that are closed.

The old Stockport branch of the Ashton canal goes through my constituency. It was handed over to the city of Manchester and to Stockport in the early 1970s, before I represented Stockport, North. Manchester decided to keep it as a right of way, but filled in the canal. Stockport filled in the canal and broke the right of way. A group is trying to reopen the canal and has a good chance of re-establishing the section through Manchester, but it will find when it reaches the Stockport boundary that the canal has been built across, and it will be virtually impossible to reopen it. That is sad, because it would have been an amenity for the area.

At Ashton, on the edge of the constituency, is the Portland basin. It has been nicely restored; the local authority and British Waterways have put in a great deal of work to make it attractive. The Huddersfield canal goes up the valley, but a section of it has been filled in and turned into a car park, and then partly built over.

All this breaks down our route heritage into small sections and destroys the unity of the longer routes. I hope that we will be given undertakings that there will be no such piecemeal selling off of canal sections.

I welcome the appointment of an ombudsman, but I am concerned about the proliferation of ombudsmen. There is

a danger of overlapping responsibilities; people are often confused about which ombudsman they should consult about problems. We should consider new legislation, so that all the roles could be incorporated in a national ombudsman. That would be better than setting up new ombudsmen for particular areas.

Sir Anthony Durant: I am a member of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner, which is looking at this matter. We are examining all aspects of the ombudsman's role.

Mr. Bennett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. The Committee should not allow ad hoc ombudsmen to be set up. Part of the argument for not setting one up for housing associations is the legislation that is required to do it. There is a strong case for a private Member's Bill to allow the national ombudsmen to extend their powers by agreement to other areas.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) is keen to take part in the debate, so I shall conclude on the issue of crime. I am worried that more is not being done to stop crime along the canals. There have been some rather sad incidents, especially in the north-west, and some rather nasty vandalism. Such happenings cause great distress to boat owners and destroy part of our historic past. We must examine ways to improve security along the canals.

The Bill is unnecessary and many people who are keen to use the canals to best effect would be happy if it progressed no further. Perhaps we should consider simpler legislation or regulations.

9.46 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) for his speed and precision, which enables me to speak about the Bill. He mentioned the Transport and Works Act 1992 as an alternative route to regulate the operation and use of canals. Earlier in the debate, I spoke about the enormous powers that the Bill gives British Waterways. Section 3(1) of the 1992 Act states:

"The Secretary of State may make an order relating to, or to matters ancillary to—

(a) the construction or operation of an inland waterway in England and Wales;".

Scotland is clearly excluded. The Secretary of State can therefore instigate mooring regulations and access to canals. Section 3(1) (b) of the 1992 Act specifically gives power to make orders for the carrying out of works that "intefere with rights of navigation in waters within or adjacent to England and Wales, up to the seaward limits of the territorial sea".

The comprehensive powers were deliberately incorporated in the Transport and Works Act to simplify a complicated pattern of primary legislation contained in Acts that were passed over the past couple of hundred years. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish and I were on the Committee that examined the Transport and Works Bill nd we knew that the present Bill was going through the Lords. In Committee, the overlapping of the two Bills was mentioned. The 1992 legislation has only just come into operation. We have not seen how effective it will be and a private Bill in parallel with the operation of that Act is entirely unnecessary.

Clause 13(2) deals with houseboats and is an example of the powers that the Bill will confer on the BWB. At least 12,000 people—probably a good many more—live on houseboats, so we are dnot dealing with a tiny section of the population. If things go wrong, and the BWB uses its powers badly, those 12,000 people could be in peril. When the Bill leaves this place, having gone through all its stages, it is out of our control. It has gone.

People may ask what the sponsor said, but the BWB could say that, while he may have given promises in good faith, it has the powers laid down in what will by then be an Act. Although they gave their assurances in good faith, the chairman and the managing director of the board may have retired by then, and different people will be in charge. All that will be left will be the Act of Parliament, so people will turn to it. When houseboat owners complain that their conditions have been changed, the BWB will be entitled to say that it has the power to do that, because, as clause 13(2) says:

"The Board may from time to time following consultations with the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and such organisations as appear to the Board to represent a substantial number of such owners of houseboats as may be affected by the proposed further general terms prescribe such further general terms as they think fit, in addition to or in substitution for those set out in the said Schedule 1, and any houseboat certificate issued or renewed after that date"

shall be on such terms.

That means that the House of Commons—apparently it has been agreed down the Corridor—is giving the BWB power to alter all of schedule 1, which is a considerable part of the Bill running over two and a half pages of close text. The BWB, a quango, can remove from primary legislation all that text because the House of Commons will have given it that power. I do not accept that proposal.

I do not accept that Ministers, who are at least accountable to some degree in that they come here and answer questions and occasionally drift across to take part in debates——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I would not go that far.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is raising qualifications and reservations. I have plenty of those, but Ministers are, to some extent, accountable to the House.

I can recall when a rumour went round that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) was to announce an increase in council rents. Hon. Members exercised a mediaeval right to declare when Parliament should be closed and blocked the Bar of the House. Many said that that was a terrible thing to do, but the left, the right and the centre of the Labour party—the broad church in operation—stood there, preventing Black Rod from getting through. Lo and behold, after a lot of consultation and a lot of raised eyebrows, the right hon. Member for Henley made his statement about council rents. That was accountability. That was democracy in action. It might have been a bit rough and tumble, but it worked.

I would not give Ministers the right to change primary legislation. All too often, the Government introduce what are called Henry VIII clauses because he cut off the heads of his wives and Ministers are given the opportunity to cut off parts of Acts.

I do not think that such powers should be handed to Ministers, so I certainly do not think that an outside body should be given the power to remove sections of legislation that this House has considered and which imposes conditions that we think are reasonable. If we decide to pass legislation on a vote, we should not put in the hands of an outside body the power to remove sections of it.

[Mr. Cryer]

I am in favour of public bodies, but the truth is that canal users mistrust British Waterways. I have a letter that has been passed to me by another hon. Member. It comes from a canal enthusiast and is dated 9 November 1992. It states:

"As I write to you on Monday 9th November 1992, we record the closure of the upper reaches of the Ridgeacre Canal in the West Bromwich part of the Birmingham Canal Navigations to which our local canal belongs. This is a particularly sad day for the waterways enthusiasts and acts as a good example of the neglect of our canals and the lack of foresight shown by British Waterways making a complete mockery of their Waterways Charter."

I have other examples. I was recently told about the problems of a public house which is reached by a footbridge over the Llangollen canal. British Waterways, no doubt under pressure from the Government's failure to provide sufficient money to maintain a centuries-old system of waterways, decided that the annual charge for access to that public house over the canal should be increased from about £150 to £10,000. I now understand that, because of publicity, the charge has been reduced. However, when such a charge is made arbitrarily, it induces confusion and concern.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with some attention. Will he consider the contrary case, which is that the Government have just made available part of the derelect land grant for the reopening of canals? Does not that in some way balance the examples that he is giving?

Mr. Cryer: No. We are not talking about what the Government have done. If they are making available some derelict land clearance grant, that is all well and good. Of course, they are cutting a wide range of grants to local authorities. My point is that the Government are accountable to the House. If we give powers to a body such as British Waterways, which acts entirely as an authority on its own account, that accountability is then out of our reach. We can argue and ask questions about derelict land clearance grant; we cannot ask questions of the chairman of British Waterways——

Mr. Robert B. Jones *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 30.

Division No. 272] [9.58 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Anthony Durant and
Mr. Alan Duncan.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Bennett, Andrew F.
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Killoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Ian
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Harry Barnes.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 27.

Division No. 273] [10.10 pm

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony

Bates, Michael
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Luff, Peter
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir Anthony Durant and
Mr. Alan Duncan.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Bennett, Andrew F.
Blunkett, David
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Etherington, Bill
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Hinchliffe, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Lynne, Ms Liz
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rowlands, Ted
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes, and
Mr. Andrew Miller.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read a Second time and committed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [2 April],

That the Amendment to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill set out in the Lords Message of 18th March be referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question again proposed.

10.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): The motion before the House is a technical one. The question is whether an amendment made to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill in another place should be referred to the Examiner. The opportunity for the House to consider the amendment will be at a later stage.

This motion simply enables the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills to consider whether the private business Standing Orders of the House have been complied with in respect of an amendment made by the Select Committee of another place. The amendment, contained in clause 22 of the Bill, relates to the land drainage powers of local authorities. It provides the clarification of these powers requested by a Select Committee of this House.

We agreed the terms with Cardiff city council, the land drainage authority most directly affected, and no one petitioned against the amendment when it was advertised in the press. It found favour with the Select Committee in another place, which amended the Bill accordingly. That is why we have this procedural motion on the Order Paper.

10.23 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Has the Minister already sat down? Does that mean that he is not willing to answer an inquiry? I will put it in the form of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. has the Minister finished?

Mr. Gwilym Jones *indicated assent.*

Mr. Rowlands: We have been treated to a disgraceful performance from the Minister by any standards. He rattled through a few nonsensical remarks and is not willing—*[Interruption.]* It is a technical matter, but it has certain implications——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the House please settle down? I am trying to listen to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rowlands: From the beginning, the generic titles of the Bills that have added up to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bills have created various procedural and constitutional problems. This Bill is unprecedented because it began as a private Bill with hybrid concepts and became a public Bill after some considerable time. Therefore, we are dealing with an unprecedented case and we deserve rather more from the Minister.

We are perfectly entitled to probe what the technical motion means for the procedures of the House and the rights of hon. Members and, more important, the rights of the individuals affected by the Bill. From the beginning, bizarre procedural problems have arisen with such Bills, especially this public one. We now face another.

One of the problems is that, from the start, we have been in uncharted waters. Tragically—I hope that my hon. Friends agree—the passing of the Transport and Works Act 1992 after the introduction of the Bill meant that most such issues would in future rightly be dealt with by a local public inquiry. We have not been allowed to have that right; we have not been allowed to have a local public inquiry under the 1992 Act because the Bill started its progress before the Act came into force. We are left with a series of bizarre procedures, including this motion. The procedure means that we must now refer to the Examiners an amendment which has not yet been agreed by the other place and which has not gone through all the procedures in the other place.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Would my hon. Friend consider the fact that in Committee we considered whether the amendment would re-hybridise the Bill? I am sure that that is a partial explanation for the brevity of the Minister's speech. In Committee, he was asked:

"Does the Minister accept that the amendment will in effect re-hybridise the Bill?"

The Minister replied:

"No sir. I urge the Committee not to pursue the amendment."

The Minister will have to eat his words tonight, which is why he kept them to a minimum.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend has again demonstrated the Minister's appalling performance. My hon. Friend's research in this respect is always assiduous. I had not spotted that reference, although I was a member of the Committee. However, I remember a number of probing arguments in Committee about the procedural aspects of the Bill. The Minister made bland and minimal speeches, as he has this evening. We are entitled to feel angry about the way in which the Minister introduced the motion.

We are asked to send to the Examiners an amendment that has been tabled in another place to a Bill that has not yet completed all its proceedings in another place. The other place may decide that it wants to send the amendment to the Examiners. Why should we decide in a Pavlovian reaction that because the other place decides to refer the amendment to the Examiners, we should do the same simultaneously?

As I understand parliamentary procedures, the amendment could be lost on Report in the other place and it could be amended at any subsequent stage in the other place. Although the Bill has not completed all its stages in the other place, we are being asked to refer the amendment to the Examiners. We can rightly object on principle to the notion that we should act in a Pavlovian fashion.

What precedents are there for behaving in such a fashion? There is one in my memory—the Channel Tunnel Bill. The only time such a motion was moved was during

the proceedings on that Bill. It is worth reminding the House what happened on the previous occasion when this procedural device was adopted.

A Transport Minister came to the Dispatch Box in the 1985-86 Session and rattled through the same nonsense we have just heard. The words were almost identical. We were told that the motion was nothing more than a technical, procedural motion. We were told that it would enable the amendment to be referred to the Examiners who, in due course, would report back. We were told that the amendment would then be referred to the Standing Orders Committee and that everyone should happily accept the process.

I remind hon. Members, especially those who were not here at the time, what happened when the procedure was used previously. A Minister moved the motion in terms identical to those used by the Minister today. On that occasion, the Minister told the House that the motion was technical and that it did not matter very much. He said that the substance of the issue was irrelevant and that the motion simply allowed the matter to be examined to discover whether it had offended our Standing Orders.

That kind of explanation is a fiction because we all know that on this occasion the alteration in the other place has already affected and offended our Standing Orders. If the Minister had been willing to allow an intervention, he would have had to admit that it cannot be argued that, as a result of the change in the other place, our Standing Orders will not be complied with. Therefore, the Standing Orders Committee will have to report to us on the matter.

The last precedent was serious because we were told by a Minister that the procedure was innocuous. However, the Standing Orders Committee reported that the amendment did not comply with our Standing Orders and actually recommended that we should not dispense with our Standing Orders. Five days after the last occasion when such a motion was moved, the House was invited to overrule the recommendation of the Standing Orders Committee and, after a vote, the decision of the Standing Orders Committee was overruled. The Government rode roughshod over a specific recommendation from our own Standing Orders Committee.

Irrespective of where we stand in relation to the argument about the Cardiff bay barrage, we should be squeamish about that last precedent. I tried to obtain one simple assurance from the Minister. If the Examiners find in respect of this motion—as I suspect that they must—that the change in the other place means that it does not comply with our Standing Orders, and if the matter then goes to the Standing Orders Committee and that Committee finds as it did in relation to the Channel Tunnel Bill—that it did not comply, and also did not recommend that the Standing Orders should be dispensed with—will the Minister assure us that he and the Government will not try to override the recommendation of the Standing Orders Committee?

As the Minister refused to allow me to obtain that simple assurance, will he give us that assurance now? Way back in 1987, the House was bamboozled by a Minister who said that the issue did not matter, but the Government then came back to the House and refused to accept the Committee's recommendation.

We object strongly to the cheap and silly way in which the Minister introduced the motion. He refused to allow me to intervene to seek that simple assurance. I invite the Minister to intervene in my speech and assure me that the Government will not do what they did in relation to the Channel Tunnel Bill, which is the only precedent that we have, and that the Government will not try to override any recommendations from the Standing Orders Committee?

The Minister either does not know or he does not wish to comment. Irrespective of the argument, we are not willing to be treated to such silly and petty behaviour from the Minister. Therefore, we must be concerned and squeamish about the exercise of such a procedure in this way, given that we have only one precedent and that not a happy one.

I was interested to read the debates on the last occasion when this issue arose. There were two debates. In the first debate, a number of hon. Members raised objections to the motion. They decided that the rights of individuals should not be overridden by a procedure of the kind that we have been asked to accept. The only vote that took place on such a motion was in the 1987 session—I apologise for not being there for that vote, but my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was present and voted against the motion—as did the Labour Deputy Chief Whip because, I assume, he sensed the constitutional or procedural issues involved.

Subsequently, when the House was faced with a recommendation of the Standing Orders Committee that it should not dispense with the Standing Orders relating to private Members Bills, and the Government sought to override the recommendation, there was a substantive debate about the rights of individuals. Indeed, if one reads that debate one genuinely senses that the House was expressing the view of many affected parties—some would have benefited but some would not.

In the case of the channel tunnel, the debate centred on the position of Mr. Patterson. Hon. Members from both sides of the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) spoke with great force and passion about the rights of the individual, which could be overridden by procedural devices of the sort that we have been asked to agree to on the nod. For that reason, I object to the motion. The way in which the Minister introduced it was disgraceful.

One of the tragedies of the debate is that, since Second Reading and Committee stage of the Bill, the House has passed legislation which would have allowed many of the arguments to be raised at the public inquiry and local inquiry levels. There are public expenditure consequences that the House should rightly debate. I should like the Minister to tell us whether a project such as the channel tunnel would have been subject to the Transport and Works Act 1992 if it had been in force.

We have had to act as a quasi-public inquiry, although such issues should properly have been heard and debated at a local public inquiry. If there were amendments of the sort that we face today, the Minister would have required a public inquiry at which people's rights could be protected cheaply and effectively rather than through the elaborate procedure of a private Bill.

It is sad that the people involved have not had the benefit of a public inquiry. Some Labour Members argued for an inquiry in a debate on a major amendment to the Bill. We said that such issues should be subject to a form of local public inquiry. If I remember correctly, we argued that case forcefully. As a result of not having that procedure, we are left in the bizarre position of having to examine an amendment which has been carried in another place.

[Mr. Rowlands]

What is worse, the procedure on the channel tunnel created a precedent in that, if the Standing Orders Committee recommends that we should not dispense with Standing Orders Nos. 10 and 11, the Government will come back and try to override that recommendation, as happened in 1987.

For those reasons, therefore, we have every right, first, to object to the manner in which the Minister introduced the motion, and secondly, justifiably to express the queasiness that we should all feel about the bizarre prodedural devices being used to railroad the Bill through.

10.39 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It is evident to all of us that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales is on trial, if I may speak figuratively, in the proceedings tonight. As I said in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), the Minister claimed in the Standing Committee that the amendment would not rehybridise the Bill. It is perhaps not out of order for me to make it clear where in the proceedings the Minister said that.

The Minister briefly referred to the Select Committee in his extraordinarily short and deficient introduction of the motion. It was not worthy of a Minister who expected to have anything other than a quick reshuffle this summer. The Select Committee had to defend the case that was made in accordance with its guidelines. The Select Committee made a recommendation on its final day on 20 February 1992. It said that there was a problem with the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill in respect of the powers under the Land Drainage Act 1991.

The Committee said that there was a problem that would have to be dealt with either in Standing Committee or in the other place. When something comes before the House, it is obviously better for it to be dealt with by the House. The opportunity to do that was in the Standing Committee on 2 July last year. It was not taken, because an undertaking was given by the same Minister who introduced the motion with extraordinary, if understandable, brevity. I suppose that if he was from the far east, he would perhaps have come to the House and fallen on his ceremonial sword.

The motion says in effect that the Minister accepts that he was completely wrong. I see the Secretary of State trying to nod some words of encouragement to his junior Minister. Perhaps the junior Minister will respond to those encouraging words and defend his indefensible position. Perhaps he will explain how the words, "No Sir, it will not have the effect of rehybridising the Bill," are compatible with the motion before us. Is the Minister saying that he did not believe then that the amendment would rehybridise the Bill, but that he has since had further education and elucidation from Government legal advisers?

Was the Minister perhaps not using the 22-carat sincerity for which he is famous when he said, "No, Sir" to the Standing Committee last July? There must be some explanation. The Minister seems remarkably reluctant to give it—I put it no higher than that. *[Interruption.]* We seem to have a Whip who has departed from the Trappist vow by which he usually abides, even if we have a Minister who has taken the Trappist vow tonight, when he is not supposed to. I am not sure what is happening on the Government Front Bench tonight. Perhaps the Minister and the Whip have swapped jobs and we have not been told. Perhaps they have anticipated the summer reshuffle. We do not know.

Let us explain how the rehybridisation, which is a relatively rare parliamentary life form, comes about. It comes about largely as a result of the way in which the old private Bill meshed with the new Government-backed hybrid Bill. We have had four Bills on the Cardiff bay barrage—two private and two public. I shall not go through the whole history tonight—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] I realise the public pressure on me to do exactly that, but I am sure that you would not find that to be in order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

There is one point at which the second Bill and the fourth Bill—which we are discussing—mesh together. They offer the explanation for the procedure being used by the Government as they attempt to escape from the trap that they have made for themselves.

The second Bill was initiated in November 1988 as a private Bill and died in early 1991 when the Government failed to win the closure motion. The Bill was then replaced by a hybrid Government Bill. I shall not expand on the third Bill, as it did not last long—it was one of the specialities of Nicholas Bennett, who was then the hon. Member for Pembroke. He believed that Wales needed the smack of firm, if incompetent, government, and the Bill died immediately. But he did not learn his lesson and introduced a second public Bill in November 1991, which we are discussing tonight.

The problem was that the research on groundwater had not been completed in November 1991. The day after the private Bill died because the closure motion was defeated, the Secretary of State said that the 12 months' worth of research on groundwater which the Select Committee on the private Bill had determined should be undertaken would still be carried out for the hybrid Bill. The research into groundwater was conducted over 12 months—it could not be completed in less time, as the effect on groundwater of the rainfall variations over the four seasons needed to be studied.

When the four-season study—which the Secretary of State agreed that the Government would continue to commission even though the private Bill was dead—was complete, the Secretary of State said—this is the key issue—that his groundwater consultant, Mr. Roy Stoner, head of the institute of irrigation studies at Southampton university, would advise him on the accuracy of the groundwater engineering studies conducted on the orders of the Cardiff Bay development corporation for the then dead private Bill. Mr. Stoner's report was published in January 1992. I have a copy with me tonight; it makes interesting reading, although I do not agree with everything in it, and the Government have not agreed to fund everything in it.

The report was the carry-over—I use the word "carry-over" in the normal vernacular sense, not in the technical parliamentary sense—or bridge between the private Bill and the Bill before us. The Roy Stoner report covered the recommendations of the Select Committee on the private Bill which had died. The Secretary of State had agreed to abide by that Committee's undertakings when he presented the hybrid Bill, the second version of which we are discussing tonight.

The text of the private Bill was submitted in November 1991, whereas Roy Stoner did not publish his work until 1992—two months later. It is because of that two-month gap that we are here tonight. If the Government had waited until January 1992, we would not have faced a problem, because the results of Roy Stoner's recommendations could have been incorporated into the Bill, which would then have been a clean, not a dirty, Bill.

That is a fair description of the way in which the Bill has been messed up by the desire of the Minister's predecessor, Nicholas Bennett, to hurry everything through. He wanted everything to be done at 100 mph, but not in order to comply with the procedures of the House. We must all be jealous of those procedures—there are times when we regard them as a bore and times when we know that they are important to the rights of ordinary individuals in this

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

country who, for centuries, have had to petition the House if a Bill, whether hybrid or private, affects their property. That is the problem.

I realise that some people regard this story as complicated, but that is not our fault. It is the fault of Ministers. The Bill might be described as the parliamentary equivalent of "The Mousetrap". The idea was dreamed up by Lord Crickhowell, who I understand is the nephew of Agatha Christie. At any rate, we have been with the Bill in its various forms for five and a half years now; I know of no other Bill that has gone on that long. It has been an indescribable saga of incompetence on the part of the promoters and the Government. Tonight is another superb example of how the Government attempt to rush these measures through.

These are not only my views. The Chairman of the Select Committee came to the same conclusions, even though he is a Conservative Member. He now chairs the Defence Select Committee——

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): This is a filibuster.

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State is trying to limit the rights of hon. Members, even though he once spoke for more than four hours on the Mersey ferries legislation. If, when he has read *Hansard,* he still believes that he has evidence of tedious repetition on my part, he may feel that he should take the Chair when he approaches the Prime Minister to learn what job he is to get in the summer reshuffle.

The Chairman of the Select Committee, dealing with the problem of what happens when the ground is saturated and may or may not qualify for the definition of flooding in such a way as to give Cardiff city council a responsibility for dealing with it, said:

"This Committee is not entirely satisfied that the Bill in its present form covers that eventuality and we would hope, therefore, that the Bill would not proceed to the Statute Book without the position being much better clarified at a later stage of its progress through both Houses. Whether that is something best done by the Standing Committee of this House or by the Committee proceedings similar to this Committee which will take place in the other House. I leave the Promoters and those involved to judge. But I would put on record that the Committee is not entirely satisfied that the Bill as currently drafted gives adequate protection in those circumstances."

My points this evening are, thus, the same as those made by the Chairman of the Select Committee. After having failed to get satisfacton from Mr. Sullivan, who was acting for the Government and for the development corporation, the Committee wanted to know how he would deal with the fact that the city council did not believe that it had powers under the Land Drainage Act 1991 to deal with saturation flooding.

For some reason, Mr. Sullivan did not concede the point there and then. But the Committee did not agree with him, as we read on page 385 of its report. They conferred and concluded that Mr. Sullivan was wrong and the country bumpkin lawyers from Cardiff city council were right, and the city council did not have the powers to deal with saturation flooding. Therefore, it would require an amendment. We can only speculate why the Committee did not accept that, but there was enormous pressure on the Committee from Government business managers to try to complete the Bill before the election. They knew that an election was pending.

The matter should have been dealt with there and then. The promoters should have come clean on 20 February and said, "The game is up. The city council is right and we concede that the saturation issue is not dealt with. The Land Drainage Act 1991 does not confer powers on local authorities to deal with such flooding and the only precedents for the definition of flooding to be used are those that are conventionally applied to over-the-ground flooding. Saturation flooding is an entirely different matter and will require an amendment to the Bill."

If that had been done and the promoters had acted without the pressure of an impending election, the Bill would have been rehybridised on 20 February 1992, 15 months ago, rather than now. I have already referred to the next opportunity for doing that, which was in the Standing Committee last July. That opportunity was not taken, not because the Standing Committee did not wish to take it but because the Minister gave an undertaking that his legal advice was still to the effect that the Land Drainage Act 1991 conferred such powers on Cardiff city council and, if it did not, it would not have the effect of rehybridising the Bill. We all knew he was wrong, and I think that he knew he was wrong, but he had to bluff his way through the Committee because the Government thought that it would be easier to deal with the matter in the other place. However, it has to be referred back here to our Standing Orders Committee.

We are debating the Bill tonight because the Minister did not take the opportunity to put the matter right in July in the Standing Committee and because the Select Committee was not hard enough with Government business managers because of pressure in the run-up to the election.

What are petitioners to make of this farrago of bungling and incompetence and lack of integrity in answering direct questions? We have to try to pick up the pieces by considering why, at this stage in the Bill's passage, we have to refer the matter to the Standing Orders Committee. Prior to debates on the Bill, people in Cardiff ask me, "Is the Bill now back in the House of Commons?" I say that it is not because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney has said, the Bill is in the House of Lords. However, for a nanosecond tonight it has been magically transformed into a Commons measure again, only to be dispatched to the Examiners and probably to the Standing Orders Committee—depending on what the Examiners say.

It is a Commons motion tonight not because the House of Lords has asked us to debate it. The Lords do not make requests to this House and we do not make requests to them, but the practical effect is that the Lords have said, "Our Standing Committee has ruled that the amendment has the effect of rehybridising the Bill. That means that the Bill has not been advertised in the proper order before November 1991. The Commons may wish to consider that."

The Lords could have decided to consider it and that would not have caused us any problems, although one would still argue that the issue should have been dealt with much earlier by Government business managers. The Bill is now stuck halfway between the Lords Select Committee, which has completed its consideration, and has passed through the Standing Committee in the Lords which has

rules that it is now rehybridised. It has not yet gone to the Lords equivalent of a Committee of the whole House. It has not had a Report stage or Third Reading; nor have we considered—nor will we be considering—the merits or demerits of the amendments.

This is simply a procedural motion. The other place has not made a request, so in effect we are being asked by the Government to take note of the "message" from the other place. We are being asked to condone the way that the Government refused to concede, in the Select Committee last year, that the Bill was being rehybridised. The Select Committee knew on the final day that it sat, as, indeed, the legal advisers to the promoters did before the general election was called on 20 February, that the Bill had to be rehybridised, but they wanted to do that at the latest stage possible so as to cause the least stir possible.

That brings up the question how jealous we should be of the rights of petitioners and of our rights, but the former most of all. If the Government had done their homework properly, after the Secretary of State's groundwater expert had given his advice, they would have known that the city council would need additional powers to slit trenches underneath—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There is too much noise.

Mr. Morgan: If the Government had done their job properly, they would have known that Cardiff city council was right. It knows its business, it knows how the land drainage Acts work, and so it should have the powers to deal with saturation. People who use the parks of Cardiff and have houses near the river might think that the council would need to go into their back gardens and dig slit trenches across and under garden walls, fish ponds, bike sheds, tool sheds, greenhouses or whatever it might be. They might not like it, but the council would have the power to do it compulsorily, and that would be part of the package that would have to be accepted with the Bill.

Unfortunately, the Government wanted to do it the slippery way, saying, "Okay, we'll tell you the main part of the Bill now, but we will keep this back until later." They decided to do that initially because of their incompetence, having rushed drafting of the Bill in November 1991, and later because they did not dare admit, while the Bill was before the House, what a mistake they had made. They wanted to brass-neck it out, and said that such matters would be easier to deal with in the other place.

That is not a good advertisement for the rights of the House, in both its Select Committees and Standing Committees. Fewer procedures in the other place to deal with such matters mean fewer rights for petitioners. Members of the other place have fewer rights in respect of rehybridisation. That is not an argument for doing something there, unless one is a Government business manager of the old school—we may have a few of those here tonight.

Putting the order through the other place would not have required an instruction from the Floor of the House. One is required here, which is why we are debating the motion now. Had it been done properly, in this House and in time and in order, the package of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill would have been much fairer to the potential petitioners, who would have known what to expect.

The Minister made the point—perhaps the only one in that abbreviated introduction—that nobody petitioned against the Bill in the other place. The number of petitions against the Bill in the other place was enormous—10 more than in this place. There were 83 before the Commons Select Committee last summer; there were 93 before the other place earlier this year. That is what is known to the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation as "exhausted opposition". I understand that that is what he said on Radio 2 the other day. He also said that tenders were going out shortly. That is an unwise remark for any promoter of a private or hybrid Bill to make.

People should never presume about this House. The procedures of both Houses are based on the principle, "It ain't over till the fat lady sings", to paraphrase "Erskine May"—*[Interruption.]* If Damon Runyon had drafted "Erskine May", it would be, "It ain't over till the gracious lady signs." We do not take kindly to the attempt by the chairman of the corporation—a great friend and appointee of the Secretary of State—to presume that everything will proceed in the way he wants, despite the fact that there are still procedures to be followed and the rights of petitioners to be considered.

Obviously, there are times when we are in favour of a Bill and we think, "Let's get the whole thing over with; why are we fussing?" However, there are other times when our constituents are affected, so obviously we think differently. We must be sure that we do not condone bypass procedures, slack draftsmanship or Bills being drafted while the engineering studies are still under way. Indeed, the Secretary of State gave a commitment to the House about those studies. If, because of that, the Bill then comes to the House in a sloppy form, it must be put right by a backwoods procedure that means that petitioners—with the foreknowledge of the Government—can petition in only one House on certain aspects of the Bill.

I am sure that we all agree that, in principle, all petitioners should have the right to petition before both Houses of Parliament. If unexpected improvements are made to a Bill, of course we must accept that they will probably come halfway through the Bill's proceedings and can be dealt with only in the other place. However, in this case, the Government knew the details at the drafting stage, but still proceeded with the Bill, thereby ensuring that the petitioners would be heard in only one House rather than two. That was a matter of Government intent or of neglect of petitioners' rights.

Surely we should be jealous to protect those rights, whatever our views on the Bill. It is important to register the fact that we are not discussing the merits or demerits of the Bill.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I am following my hon. Friend's argument with great care. I can understand his criticism of the procedure that has brought us here tonight. However, I am not clear about the practical effect of what is happening. As I understand it, the motion is to refer to the Examiners an amendment that meets the concerns of the Select Committee, the Lords and the petitioners, including our colleagues on Cardiff city council, and that there is no petition against the amendment. If the procedural motion were to be passed, the amendment would then go to the Examiners.

Is my hon. Friend saying that that places us in a dilemma because we would either have to block an improvement to the Bill—which presumably we want—or appear to condone bad procedure? Is that the essence of my hon. Friend's argument.

Mr. Morgan: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. Any improvement that is proposed late in the passage of a Bill inevitably places us in a dilemma, whatever our views about the barrage. We may say, "Procedurally this is a mess, but on the other hand, are we or are we not against this improvement requested by Cardiff city council?"

Tonight is not about the merits or demerits of the barrage or of Cardiff city council's amendments, which it should have been granted in the Select Committee a year last February. The Minister should have conceded in Standing Committee last year that it was necessary to incorporate them; he only agreed to incorporate them belatedly. Having denied in Committee that they would rehybridise the Bill, he agreed to incorporate them in another place.

We are not talking, either, about the merits or demerits of Cardiff city council acquiring powers, by amending the Land Drainage Act 1991, but about the bypass procedure being requested of the House tonight, which, in effect, condones the Government's bungling of the saturation flooding question.

The last thing that I want is to deny Cardiff city council the powers to deal with saturation flooding, but that should have been done in February 1992. The Government's business managers knew that all along, but acted in the way that they did because of the pressures of the upcoming election in February and because the procedures in another place for rehybridisation are easier than in this House, because they do not require an instruction from the Floor of the House.

Giving evidence to the Select Committee in January 1992, James Stewart Mackay said that it had all happened in a rush. People may ask, "With a Bill that has been before the House for five and a half years, how can anything be done in a rush?" But that is what occurred in November 1991. Mr. Mackay was asked by the Select Committee, "Are you saying that you actually gave this matter serious consideration in the city council?"—but the council did not have that much time to consider it. Nevertheless, it managed to get to the heart of the matter straight away. I believe that privately the Government's business managers also got to the heart of the matter straight away but did not want to tell this House.

The Government's business managers have not been straight with this House, and neither were they straight in pressurising the Standing Committee not to recommend that the Bill should incorporate the amendment to the Land Drainage Act 1991. They knew in their heart of hearts that that was required, but instead recommended that a correction should be made at a later stage. That later stage was reached in another place, when it should have been dealt with by the Standing Committee last July. The Minister has been shy about offering his view on those matters tonight, and obviously the Government did not do their homework.

The effect of not accepting the amendment tonight would, as far as one can tell, be relatively modest. It would not, I believe, kill the improvements. I should be happy to be corrected, if the Minister wants to rise from his torpor. The effect of the matter not going to the Standing Orders Committee now would be that we would allow the message from another place to rest on the table for the time being. Perhaps the Secretary of State will confirm that.

The other place could then proceed, as it could have done when its Select Committee reported to its Standing Orders Committee that the effect would be to rehybridise the Bill. It would then go before a Committee of the whole House in another place, and there could be a Report stage and Third Reading. It would then return to this House and be referred to the Standing Orders Committee by the Examiners, if it was felt that the change had rehybridised the Bill.

It is just a question whether we are happy for the Bill briefly to have a parallel life in both Houses. That is what we are discussing tonight. It is acceptable if we emphasise the fact that Cardiff city council has been proved right, and requires additional powers, contrary to what the promoters said in the Select Committee. I believe that they conceded the point to the city council within half an hour of the end of its sitting. That is not a very happy set of circumstances.

It could be said that allowing the motion to be passed would mean condoning this way of doing things. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney implied, the Government business managers will get their way anyway, regardless of the rights of petitioners. It is the "crime pays" argument. Legislative crime pays: it is possible to bluff one's way through a Standing Committee, as the Minister does by saying "No, Sir," when he should have said "Yes, Sir." I hope that a suitable opportunity will arise for him to tell us why he said that this development would not have the effect of rehybridising the Bill.

The silence is deafening. If Ministers who cannot defend themselves choose to remain silent, we can all read into it whatever we wish. Is the Minister willing to accept that he was uttterly, miserably wrong when he said "No, Sir" in July last year?

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Answer.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister now wish us to pretend that that did not happen—that he was not there? Did the Eskimos take over for a day?

Mr. Davies: Answer.

Mr. Morgan: Did a doppelganger or lookalike turn up in Committee on the day concerned? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There are too many seated interventions, and there have been one or two private conversations as well.

Mr. Morgan: However, we may take the view that the emphasis should be on ensuring that ministerial conduct is of the best, and on an unwillingness to condone slack, incompetent, bungling ministerial conduct. If we take that view, we must adopt a strong line. The Minister could, and should, have put matters right well before now; he should have taken the legislative consequences if the Bill had to be delayed by two, six or 12 months. That does not matter, as long as the rights of petitioners are dealt with fairly. People should know who will be affected when a Bill is presented to this House, as this Bill was in November 1991.

Everyone is supposed to know by a certain date—usually in November—which private and hybrid Bills are being presented, in what form they are being presented and whether they themselves will be affected. Some users of property in the affected area knew in November 1991 that the Bill would affect them; others did not. We are concerned tonight with those who did not.

The Minister said that no one had petitioned against this aspect of the Bill. I entirely accept that; but the people

concerned did not petition because they had been placed in an impossible position. If they petition against the Bill in the other place when it has already been given half its consideration, they will be left in the position described by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). Anyone who petitions effectively against that aspect of the Bill in isolation—in isolation, because it has arisen at a late stage in the other place—will be faced with a dilemma: "Do I want an improvement in the Bill which, according to the city council, is necessary to prevent saturation flooding? If I do, I should like to have been told nevertheless. I should have been given the total package of the Bill, with all its consequences, when it was first presented."

That is the problem that we encounter when Bills are drafted incompetently. The material date for those who knew about the effects on their property to petition against the Bill was November 1991; but those whose property was affected by the clause that we are discussing did not know until earlier this year, when the Bill went to another place and the Government introduced their amendment. Their rights have been adversely affected. They were not told. It was not something that came like a bolt from the blue: it was already implicit in the work that the Government's own engineering adviser, Roy Stoner, was doing. It is not good enough to say, "We will make it up as we go along and put it right when we feel like it."

The Government have put themselves in a position of extraordinary weakness—as they did in May 1991, when they failed to get a closure; in July 1991, when the first hybrid Bill failed to get through the Standing Orders Committee; and again in November 1991, when the present Bill was drafted, two months before the Government's own engineering adviser, who could have told the Secretary of State what would need to be incorporated in the Bill if it was ever to reach a satisfactory state of engineering competence, finished his work. But engineering competence, as well as political competence, is something that we have learnt the hard way not to expect from the Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Amendment to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill set out in the Lords Message of 18th March be referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

Concentration in the Media

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4213/93, relating to concentration in the media; welcomes the Commission's intention to have a full and open consultation on this issue; and requests the Government to respond to the document in a way which takes full account of the principle of subsidiarity, having also taken full account of the views expressed in European Standing Committee B on 12th May.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

Fisheries Agreement: Argentina

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4769/93, relating to a proposed fisheries agreement between the European Economic Community and the Argentine Republic; and supports the Government's determination to secure an agreement which, whilst safeguarding the United Kingdom's position on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, provides for the Community's involvement in the development of Argentina's fishing resources.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Question agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): With the leave of the House, I will put together the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Northern Ireland

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Family Law (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 14th April, be approved.

That the draft Family Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 14th April, be approved.

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991

11.20 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 16,000 signatories throughout the country. The petition has been compiled by the Pro Dogs national charity, north-east branch, and reads:

"To the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble petitioners of Pro Dogs national charity, north-east branch and undersigned petitioners sheweth that the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 requires amendment to provide safeguards for law-abiding dog owners and their dogs. Wherefore, your petitioners pray that your honourable House amend the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 to allow discretion when considering the destruction of dogs which may be exercised on the particular facts of each case."

To lie upon the Table.

Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

11.22 pm

Dr. Joe Hendron (Belfast, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate an Adjournment debate on the Royal Victoria hospital, which, by any standards, is the finest hospital in western Europe. It was the first hospital in the world to have a cardiac ambulance. Thousands of people in Northern Ireland, and, indeed, in Britain, owe their lives to the expertise and brilliance of the magnificent staff of that hospital. Those people include members of the security forces.

The facilities of the hospital include the accident and emergency unit, which is the very heart of the hospital. They include general medical and general surgical beds and the regional specialties of thoracic surgery, neurosurgery and cardiac surgery.

On Friday 14 May, thousands of people in Belfast marched through the city centre to the headquarters of the Eastern health and social services board. There was a howling wind and it was pouring with rain. Those people came from the Catholic Falls road and the Protestant Shankhill road; Nationalists and Unionists crossed the sectarian divide to bring one message to the Eastern board and the Department—to take their hands off the Royal Victoria hospital, which has served that community so well over the years.

I should like to acknowledge the help that I have received from the NUPE and COHSE trade unions, the representatives of the West Belfast health monitoring committee, the management of the Royal Victoria hospital trust and the medical and general staff of the hospital in making my case for that hospital.

When the hospital management team was preparing to respond to the "Statement of Intent" from the Eastern health and social services board for general (acute) hospital services within that board, the discussion was pre-empted and superseded by recent proposals on purchasing strategy for 1993-94. The board offered the hospital a contract that would result in 1,200 fewer general surgical operations, elective operations, plus 1,500 fewer ear, nose and throat procedures. The prospect of a substantial reduction in elective general surgery and ENT procedure is viewed with great alarm by everyone on the hospital staff.

The medical staff feel that it is most unfortunate that a discussion about the acute hospital services for 1994 and beyond should be rendered so pointless by changes to be introduced in 1993. It is quite bizarre that disciplines with a particular value for undergraduate teaching and research, and hence "star" supplement, should be removed from the hospital. That will lead to a loss of income that will further accelerate the downward spiral on which the hospital now seems set.

The present process of contracting contravenes the DHSS management executive's guiding principles, as set out in a document published in consultation with the boards. That document deals with stability, and states:

"Contracting should not lead to the disruption and destabilisation of services, nor should it lead to the disruption of education and training."

That is exactly what it has done. That document also states:

"In the first year of contracting, Boards and Units will maintain a steady state"—

it is important to stress the use of the words "steady state"—

"except where changes have been planned and mutually agreed. Where changes in current service patterns are proposed, adequate notice must be given to allow the parties involved to make and manage the adjustments."

That is a farce, when one considers the type of contract that the board tried to force on the Royal Victoria hospital recently.

At a recent meeting with the officers of the Eastern board, I asked about consultation. I was told that one cannot consult over every major issue that requires a decision. My goodness, this contract arrangement is the most important decision to be put to the Royal Victoria in my 30 years as a general practitioner in west Belfast.

In its own document, the Eastern board accepts that only three hospitals in its area reach the required standard of clinical effectiveness. It then proceeds to downgrade one of them.

The removal of 1,200 general surgical operations from the Royal Victoria represents one third of the work of general surgeons. They will also be expected to continue to treat complex, major surgical cases referred to them from elsewhere. I am not talking about regional specialities of the hospital, but the work of the general surgeons. They are so experienced that cases are referred to them from other parts of the north of Ireland. They are expected to undertake that work as well as emergency work. That means that in future, if a local doctor refers his patients to the Royal Victoria, those patients will be turned away and sent elsewhere.

One senior surgeon told me that, if he carried out an endoscopy on a patient with stomach cancer, that person would then be sent home and his GP would have to arrange for admission to another hospital. That may lead to a possible delay of one month.

When it comes to trauma, the Royal Victoria is the only hospital with neurology, thoracic surgery, cardiac surgery and burns units. Major trauma also requires a general surgical input. If surgery procedures are run down this year, they will never recover. The Royal Victoria hospital now has fewer than half the beds it had five years ago.

It is important to realise that, at the initial tender for the contract, the Royal Victoria hospital was the cheapest of all the providers, but the Eastern health board held a Dutch auction in reverse, toing and froing between the Royal Victoria, the Ulster and City hospitals, and finished by proposing to withdraw services from the Royal Victoria.

It is hard for the Royal Victoria to come to terms with the fact that, within a few weeks of obtaining trust status, it has been plunged into a deeper and more severe financial crisis than it has previously experienced. Indeed, the future of the hospital's clinical profile is in great jeopardy.

The strategy encouraged by the board in its "Statement of Intent" document relies wholly on four highly suspect assumptions. The first has to do with population changes. It is assumed that the population of central Belfast will continue to move to outlying areas of the board. The second assumption involves new health care identities and the belief that the Eastern health board population can legitimately be forced into three new catchment areas. Phrases such as "east and west of the Lagan" are used

—anyone who knows Northern Ireland has heard of "east and west of the Bann" but not "east and west of the Lagan".

The other assumptions talk about a reduction in services purchased by other boards and a reduction in acute care in west Belfast. The implication is that there will be fewer cases from west Belfast.

The board defines accessibility as giving the best possible access to patients, visitors and staff, geographically and in terms of ready availability and having regard to safety. However, the board fails to define what it means by safety and completely ignores the sectarian geography of Belfast. I do not like using such language, because I am not a sectarian person, but it is a fact of life. To give an example, the people of Poleglass and Twinbrook on the edge of west Belfast will not go to the Lagan Valley hospital, because they look on the Royal Victoria hospital as their hospital.

A number of reports in recent years, including "The Health Divide", the Black report, which dealt with health inequalities, and independent studies in the *British Medical Journal*, all link unemployment and poverty to ill health. West Belfast has approximately 40 per cent. of the total number of unemployed people in Belfast and 10·7 per cent. of the long-term unemployed in Northern Ireland. North and west Belfast have the highest percentage of low birth weight babies. Of the 12 wards in Northern Ireland rated to have the worst overall health, six are in west Belfast.

We must show that we care about our sick, injured, frail, old and deprived people, whoever they may be and wherever they live. Managers at the Royal Victoria hospital have given the lead by refusing to sign the Eastern health board contract. The chairman of the Royal group of hospitals, Dr. George Quigley, has called for an independent inquiry into the board's proposals for health care provision, and I support that call.

Last Friday, I had a meeting with the Secretary of State about his recent trip to the United States. I accept in good faith the fact that he was genuinely trying to get inward investment into Northern Ireland, although other subjects were also discussed. However, I would say to him and to the Earl of Arran that any attempt to run down the Royal Victorial hospital, which is the major employer in west Belfast and the surrounding area, would make ring hollow any promises made from the United States or projects such as "making Belfast work".

Apparently, there is to be arbitration between the management executive and the board, but the Secretary of State and his Ministers are now directly involved. I hope that common sense will prevail and that the Royal Victoria hospital will be allowed to continue to provide the outstanding service that it has given for so many years.

11.33 am

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): With the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron), I should also like to question the Minister on this very serious and highly emotional issue. The Royal Victoria hospital is important not only to Belfast but to all the people of Northern Ireland.

At the important level of what could be described as the public health of the people of Northern Ireland in terms of their relationships with each other, the Government are rightly anxious to get both sections of our community working together, especially in their common interests. Nowhere in Northern Ireland has shown a greater example of that than the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast and its staff. The staff are drawn almost 50:50 from both sections of our community.

Throughout the past terrible 20 years, and in spite of its location, there has never been a single sectarian incident in the hospital among the staff. In spite of their differences, they have worked solidly to deal with the health of the people who come to them. They have become internationally expert in dealing not only with heart cases, but with many of the illnesses that arise out of the trauma of our violent situation.

The hospital has given an example to the world. Despite the weather in the streets of Belfast last week, all those in the hospital, from the highest consultant to the medical staff, the nurses, the porters and the domestic staff, were together, solidly backed by the people of the Shankhill road and the people of the Falls road. When we get such agreement in Northern Ireland, we surely have a duty to maintain it, especially when it deals with something that is fundamental to us all—the health of our people.

11.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Dr. Hendron) for raising the question of the future of the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast. As a general practitioner in west Belfast, the hon. Gentleman is an authority on the Royal Victoria and he is respected there, just as he is respected here for that knowledge and dedication.

My colleague Lord Arran, who has responsibility for health and social services matters in Northern Ireland, has asked me to say that he is naturally extremely concerned by the stories that have been circulating about this renowned hospital, which has for a very long time held a pre-eminent position as the premier teaching hospital and centre of medical excellence in Northern Ireland. It is also greatly valued as the general hospital for the people of west Belfast. On his behalf, I welcome this opportunity to make clear the Government's views on the Royal Victoria hospital and on its future role. I hope that they will add to the hon. Gentleman's conversation with the Secretary of State last Friday.

I begin, therefore, by making it absolutely clear that the hospital will continue in each of the capacities mentioned. There is no question of the Royal Victoria losing either of them, let alone of its closing, or of a conspiracy to bring it to its knees by a series of cuts in its services. On the contrary, we wish to develop the benefit of the enormous capital investment in the past in the hospital and in the associated hospitals in the group which make up the Royal group of hospitals.

For example, over the past five years, some £13 million has been spent on a variety of schemes on the Royal group of hospitals site. Current major building schemes on the RGH site under construction or about to start amount to some £18 million. The schemes include new laboratories, a new mortuary, an extension to the dental hospital and further redevelopment of the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children. Only recently, my colleague Lord Arran opened a new magnetic resonance imaging unit at the Royal, the very latest in high-tech diagnostic equipment and the only one in Northern Ireland.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

Within the past two years, new cardiac surgery theatres have been built, and a new cardiac catheterisation unit and cardiac intensive care beds have been provided. Over the past five years, Government have spent some £13 million on major schemes alone and are now spending or plan to spend a further £18 million. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that there is no intention of allowing those enormous investments to go to waste.

I want to put it firmly on the record that the future of the Royal group is secure. The hon. Member for Belfast, West, of all people, will, with his expert medical knowledge to which I have alluded, recognise that advances in medical and surgical research and practice justify and demand changes in the provision of hospital services if full advantage of them is to be gained. Any examination of the history of the RVH will reveal that it has evolved very successfully over the years to meet the demands made upon it and to embrace the newest medical and technological developments. I have every confidence that it will continue to do that.

The Government have introduced an internal market into the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland reflecting what has happened here in Great Britain. That means that the health and social services boards and some GPs have become purchasers of services and that hospitals, such as the Royal group of hospitals trust, which I am pleased to have helped establish, have become largely autonomous providers which are expected to respond to the requirements of their purchasers and to compete among themselves to secure contracts.

The Government expect boards and GP fundholders to use the contracting process and the spur of competition to tackle inefficiencies. That should improve the quality of services and develop new services. The RGH trust, like every other provider, will be expected to participate fully in this process and to adapt as necessary to meet the requirements of its purchasers.

I should like if I may to say a few words about the position of the Eastern health and social services board, which, as the Royal's principal purchaser, can be expected to have a considerable degree of influence over the future direction of the Royal. I am aware that the chairman of the Eastern board made it clear last week that the board envisages a continuing and important role for the Royal, and we naturally welcome that.

As the hon. Member for Belfast, West if fully aware, the board has proposed a number of changes to the pattern of hospital services in its area, and those are set out in its "Statement of Purchasing Intent for Acute Hospital Services". The closing date for comments on that was 14 May. I know that the hon. Gentleman, along with many others, has made his views fully known to the board, and indeed in person to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

My noble Friend Lord Arran has made it clear that he does not intend to comment at this stage on the merits or otherwise of the board's proposals. After all, the board will need to weigh the very many responses which it has received, and to reach its own conclusions about the future direction of acute hospital services in the Eastern area as part of its remit. However, I know that the board is fully aware that its conclusions must come to the Minister responsible for health and social services for his endorsement before they can be reflected in the board's future purchasing intentions.

My noble Friend will want in particular to be satisfied that Queen's university will continue to be able to discharge its clinical teaching and research responsibilities satisfactorily and that the very specialised regional medical services, provided almost entirely in the two Belfast teaching hospitals, will be properly safeguarded.

I am aware, from what the hon. Gentleman has said, that a matter of more immediate alarm and concern is the board's proposals for the purchase of services from the Royal in 1993-94. I hope what I have said about the security of the Royal's future will go far to dispel that concern.

The board has a duty, however, to ensure that the money available to it is spent in a way that secures the maximum provision of services of the high quality that is needed and expected. That must be beyond question. Unnecessary expenditure is money wasted that could be spent on more operations, improved facilities for patients, and on scanners, drugs, hospital amenities and anything that could benefit patients in Northern Ireland.

While mentioning patients, I must stress that the reason for our reforms—remembering that any money saved in our health reforms is ploughed back into patient care—is to benefit patients. As far as we are concerned, patients are the most important people in the provision of a national health service.

I value greatly, as does Lord Arran, the excellent service provided by doctors, nurses and all those who work in ancillary services in our hospitals. We take pride in the quality of health in Northern Ireland. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is second to none. The patients do and must come first. Therefore, we must ensure that their needs are answered. That is why the board must look carefully at relative costs when considering future contracts. The board has reached agreement with all the other providers, but at present there is disagreement with the Royal group and the City hospital as to the board's proposals.

The hon. Gentleman set out the nature of those proposals. Their purpose is to secure the delivery of general surgery and ENT treatment as the lowest available cost but with no decline in standards. The proposals derive from the respective costings offered by the Royal and the City hospital and from no hidden agenda of any sort.

The Management Executive of the Department of Health and Social Services has been asked to resolve the issue. It will aim to do that as quickly as possible, in consultation with both parties. It will, of course, wish to take into account the reliability of the costings offered by both the Royal and the City hospital, but it will wish to consider a number of other factors, including the implications of the proposed transfer of admissions for teaching and specialised regional services.

Both Lord Arran and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State are well aware of the concerns that many have raised about the impact of any reductions in services at the Royal, both on the accessibility of hospital services for the population of west and north Belfast and the unemployment level there. The unemployment level in west Belfast is already extremely high. Lord Arran has asked me to say that he will ensure that those areas are examined most carefully both in seeking a resolution of the

contract issue between the eastern board and the Royal in 1993-94 and assessing the board's longer-term proposals for the Royal.

Hospitals do not exist in total isolation from the communities that they serve. Hospitals are part of the community. Therefore, the provision of services in west Belfast is an important contribution to the economy of that area. That point is admitted, and will be taken into account by my noble Friend when he takes his consideration of these issues later.

I know that Lord Arran has been concerned that a good deal of the negotiation process between the board and the Royal has been exposed to the media and that that has caused widespread concern in the public at large about the future of the Royal and their access to services. Both he and I regard this as most regrettable. I would ask those who have chosen to go public in that way—while doubtless for the best of motives—to consider carefully whether that is serving the best interests of the public and patients.

Mr. Hume: When the Minister talks about people going public and dealing with the best interests of the patients, he must realise that he is talking about the senior consultants, the medical staff, the nursing staff and the entire staff of the hospital, who have provided the outstanding service to which he referred. Last week, they went public in a powerful way. If they are deeply concerned about this matter, is it any wonder that the rest of us are concerned?

Mr. Hanley: What I said still stands. I have no wish on earth to believe that the doctors, the nurses or any of those involved in the ancillary services have anything other than the interests of patients at heart. I said that they had done what they did for understandable reasons.

But they are in a process of negotiation. I do not believe that making the matter public has created the right atmosphere within which sensible decisions can necessarily be taken. It increases worry and tension.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hanley: No. I am coming to the end now, and I want to complete my speech.

To go public during the contracting process is undesirable.

Mr. McNamara: What about the public interest?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman mentions the public interest. I am answering the public interest. I hope that the debate tonight helps to answer the public interest and assure the people not only of Belfast but of Northern Ireland that the future of the Royal Victoria hospital is secure.

There have been calls from some quarters for the Department of Health and Social Services to set aside the board's strategic planning process for hospital services and carry out a regional overview. My colleague Lord Arran has rejected that, on the grounds that boards are expected to plan their services within regional guidelines issued by the Department. That is what the Eastern board is required to do, and exactly what it is doing. I am sure that we can resolve the issues in the coming weeks.

The Royal Victoria hospital is, as the hon. Member for Belfast, West said, pre-eminent in its field. I spent many months when I was the Minister with responsibility for health and social services dealing with the Royal and its on-going problems and trying to secure the service for the future. I believe that that future is secure, as I have said several times this evening, but no hospital can stand still and say that, because it exists, it should therefore be funded. It has to justify its existence and improve its service to the public in terms of the medicine that it provides, the new techniques which are available and the added expectations of the public.

In the national health service, we provide neither a job protection scheme nor furniture warehouses. We provide places where skills will meet the needs of patients. Therefore, the hospital will succeed into the future, and the funding that the Government have provided for Northern Ireland will continue to increase. I believe that the future of the Royal Victoria hospital is secure for patients. I hope that the negotiations in the coming few weeks will prove that that is so. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, West for the contribution that he has made tonight, which I am sure is an important part of that debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 18 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HARRIS TWEED BILL [*Lords*]
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

European Fighter Aircraft

1. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current position of the Eurofighter 2000 project.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): Progress on the Eurofighter project is generally satisfactory. The development phase is proceeding in line with the agreement reached with our partners last December and we expect the first flight later this year.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that if we do not have the Eurofighter that will severely restrict our defence capability and it will be a disaster for British industry and British jobs? Does he welcome the more positive approach being shown by German Defence Ministers?

Mr. Aitken: I certainly subscribe to all the views expressed by my hon. Friend. We need Eurofighter for our future defence capability. We can certainly benefit from the—approximately—28,000 jobs that it will create in our defence industries when the production phase comes into account. Three hundred companies will have contract work under the Eurofighter contract, including one, Cossor Electronics, in my hon. Friend's constituency. I welcome the highly positive and co-operative approach now being shown by the German Government.

Mr. Martlew: In the Gulf debate on 21 January this year, the Secretary of State acknowledged the cross-party support that there had been for the Eurofighter 2000 project. He said, however, that despite the importance of Eurofighter it had to be affordable. Why, then, have the Government allowed the costs of the fighter to increase by 50 per cent., from £21 billion to £31 billion? Will that affect the number of aircraft that will be ordered for the RAF? Will it affect the aircraft's specifications?

Finally, Eurofighter was due to make its maiden flight in 1991. It is now unlikely to fly before the autumn. Why?

Mr. Aitken: I certainly acknowledge the good-cross party support that we have received from the Opposition —I hope that it is not being undermined today by the hon. Gentleman's comments.

I urge the hon. Gentleman not to believe everything that he reads about prices, even in the most eminent newspapers. He should remember Evelyn Waugh's definition of a newspaper library—that compendium of other journalists' mistakes which newspapers have the audacity to call a library. The report of 50 per cent. price increases did not include an allowance for inflation. The real cost increase in the programme compared with the 1988 baseline is under 10 per cent., not 50 per cent., as was reported without allowing for inflation. The increase is unwelcome, but not unusual for a project of this size and complexity. I can confirm that the RAF still intends to order about 250 aircraft.

Mr. James Hill: Will my hon. Friend not be dismayed by the siren voices opposite? The Eurofighter is absolutely essential for the defence of Europe. It is part of a programme that we cannot discontinue. If we did, that would be a return to the old days when we scrapped aircraft when they were just about to fly. That would be quite wrong. Although the costs have risen by 50 per cent. since 1988, we should remember that this has been a time of inflation when costs have had to be adjusted. I ask the team to stand firm on this project.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend speaks for Britain. He remembers that Britain has a proud record of aircraft manufacturing, going back to the great days of the Lancaster and the Spitfire and now continuing with the Eurofighter 2000. That record has been blemished only by the misguided cancellation by the Labour party of the TSR2. I can certainly confirm that we intend to stand by the project.

Kuwait

2. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made as to what percentage of total orders of defence equipment from Kuwait since the Gulf war has been won by United Kingdom firms.

Mr. Aitken: We estimate that in 1991 and 1992 United Kingdom defence-related sales to Kuwait amounted to some 30 per cent. of the value of total orders placed by that country.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister agree that the word around the defence industries is that there have been very few firm orders from Kuwait since the Gulf conflict? Does he further agree that the defence sector of our manufacturing base is still vital to this country? If, in competition with the Americans, we cannot gain more orders from places such as Kuwait, is not it about time that we took steps to enable our defence manufacturing sector to diversify more quickly?

Mr. Aitken: I am glad to know that the hon. Gentleman supports the export successes of our defence industries. He will therefore be pleased that I am able to tell the House that the latest figures for the year ended 31 December 1992 show that we managed to achieve export orders of £5·1 billion, which is 20 per cent. of the world market. Both of those are record figures, and ones of which we, and especially the defence industrial base, can be proud.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about Kuwait, it is true that only limited definite orders have been placed so far. However, they are good orders and United Kingdom defence successes have included contracts for mine clearance, naval base reconstruction, tactical radios and technical school equipment. The biggest projects of all are the tank project, which went to the Americans, and the Warrior and Piranha contracts, which we hope will come to us. We believe that, on a Government-to-Government basis, there are good grounds for having confidence that the contract will soon be negotiated. The Kuwait Government have announced that they have selected the Warrior and the Piranha for their armoured vehicles, so we are optimistic about those exports.

Sir Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend consider allowing our defence industry to learn the lessons of Kuwait and sell to those countries that are presently barred to it? After all, our NATO and European friends are allowed to sell to those countries.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend draws attention to the fact that, as well as our tremendous record of export successes, Britain has a high record for exporting responsibly. We examine all export licences on their merits, taking into account a wide range of considerations including human rights and the stability of the countries concerned. We manage to combine great success with a full sense of responsibility.

"Options for Change"

3. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent reappraisals have been done of the "Options for Change" programme.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I assure my hon. Friend that we keep the "Options for Change" programme under constant review. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence outlined to the House on 20 April, *Official Report*, columns 175-76, we have also undertaken a detailed analysis of how resources are taken up in meeting our commitments around the world, and expect to report the results in this year's "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, while we are rightly proud of the high standards of our armed forces, the growing and worsening gap between our commitments—some of which were not envisaged two or three years ago—and the resources available is beginning to undermine morale and professional standards? A number of indicators are beginning to show that, such as the over-subscription of those applying for redundancy and the massive shortfall in applications for Sandhurst. In view of the great overstretch in our regular forces, it is not the time to be considering further cuts in our volunteer reserves.

Mr. Hamilton: The position on commitments is not just one way. My hon. Friend will have noted the recent announcement that eventually we will be withdrawing the garrison from Belize. That is good news as it was part of the emergency tour plot that had to be rotated through there. The position remains as it was—if there is a major change in our commitments, we shall reconsider. That is what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State did when he restored two battalions under his recent proposals. Therefore, matters are not fixed; we keep the position under review, depending on commitments. We shall be making an announcement on reserve forces by the end of the year.

Mr. Hutton: Will the Minister confirm that "Options for Change" envisaged a submarine strength for the Royal Navy of 16 vessels, but that now the Government are actively trying to dispose of all the type 2-400 diesel submarines to a foreign navy? What strategic assessment underlies that surprising change of policy?

Mr. Hamilton: We have made it clear that the hon. Gentleman must wait for the White Paper when it will be made clear what realignments have been made in our force structures and that will include the submarine fleet.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in this dangerous and troubled world in which we live, the demands that are likely to be put on our armed forces require him and his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence constantly, as he says, to keep under review what is required? Is he aware that on the Conservative Benches there are many who would support him and his colleagues if he had to go to the Treasury for more money?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, there may well be, but we are spending one and a half times the European average. There are good reasons for doing that, and I suspect that, despite the cuts that we are making in the defence budget, we shall continue to spend about one and a half times the European average, as our European partners cut their defence budgets as well. In those circumstances, I am not sure whether, with a £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement, it would be right to seek significant increases in the defence budget.

Dr. David Clark: Do not all the random cuts in our defence capabilities about which we have been hearing in recent weeks merely show that the Government have no long-term defence strategy? Instead of playing around with "Options For Change", why does not the Minister listen to the Opposition, the Select Committee on Defence and many experts and set up a full defence review so that we can match our forces to our commitments?

Mr. Hamilton: But that is precisely the position that we are in. We can match our forces to our commitments and it is nonsense to pretend otherwise. What we cannot do is to take on endless new commitments without severely overstretching our forces, and that is something of which we must be mindful. I find it quite cool for the Opposition to tell me how insufferable that position is when we know that their party conference passes motions annually saying that our defence budget should be slashed by 25 or 30 per cent. It is about time that they sorted out their own shop before they criticise us.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend bear in mind when preparing his end-year review of the reserve forces their immense value to our country? They are efficient, enthusiastic and highly cost effective —a resource enjoyed by no other country. Never leave them out of account.

Mr. Hamilton: I have to take my hon. Friend's view, but I think that she will agree that our reserve forces want roles that are relevant to the future and that is something on which we are working at the moment.

Royal Navy

4. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of *(a)* admirals in the Royal Navy and *(b)* capital ships in May 1970, May 1980 and at the present time.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not held for May of each year. Using a definition of capital ships as major warship platforms, including aircraft carriers, commando ships, SSBNs, SSNs, cruisers, destroyers and frigates, there were 92 capital ships and 74 admirals at 1 April 1970, 85 capital ships and 62 admirals in 1980 and 59 capital ships and 42 admirals in 1993.

Mr. Prentice: Those figures are at variance with the figures that I have received from the House of Commons Library which tell me that, for the first time ever, we have more admirals than ships in the Royal Navy. At a time when the Navy is cutting back on exercises by 25 per cent. to save fuel, and when Swan Hunter is being closed, what consideration is being given to the nuclear component? Specifically, will the Minister give the House an assurance that no progress will be made with the tactical air-to-surface missile, which most Opposition Members think would be a complete waste of money?

Mr. Hamilton: I am rather confused about what that question was supposed to mean. The comparison between admirals and the number of ships is not a good one, because only three out of the 42 or 60 admirals, or however many we have at the moment, drive ships. The admirals administer the men and organisation of the Royal Navy, which spends some £6 billion per year, for which we need a structure of senior managers.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about TASM, I think that he knows that we are reviewing what we should do about our tactical nuclear system and he will have to wait for an announcement.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the great tradition of the Royal Navy to consider crew and family welfare as a priority? Does he acknowledge that many of the crew who man our nuclear deterrent submarine force are home-based in Scotland? On that basis, does he believe that it would be a great advantage to ensure that the maintenance of the Trident fleet remains in Scotland?

Mr. Hamilton: Absolutely. Considering the enormous amount of money that has been spent on the Trident facility in Scotland, it is sad that we have not received more thanks from Opposition Members for that enormous investment, which is one of the largest in western Europe.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister appreciate that in his confusion about figures today he has revealed that the Government intend to reduce the Royal Navy to fewer than 40 ships? As a result, we shall not need four warship building yards. With that in mind, will he confirm that that was the reason why Swan Hunter was sacrificed? Will he support the Opposition's call for an inquiry into the events surrounding the tender for the helicopter landing ship—a call which was endorsed by the Select Committee on Defence this morning?

Mr. Hamilton: That is the most extraordinary assertion. When that contract was awarded it was made clear that there was an enormous gap—in excess of £50 million—between the two bids. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should have accepted the Swan Hunter bid, although it would have cost the taxpayer more than £50 million more than the VSEL bid, he should say so. That is an absolutely ridiculous way to carry on. If the Select Committee wishes to investigate and feels that the National Audit Office would like to look at the figures, it is more than welcome to do so and we shall be happy to show them why we reached our conclusion.

European Fighter Aircraft

5. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet the Spanish Defence Minister to discuss the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Aitken: My right hon. and learned Friend will meet Senor Vargas at the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers next week. That will provide an opportunity to review progress on Eurofighter 2000.

Mr. Carrington: Does my hon. Friend agree that that project represents the right sort of European defence co-operation between us and our EC partners? Does he agree that it is vital to impress on those partners that the project is flexible, state of the art and able to meet all the defence challenges that our armed forces might need to tackle during the coming years?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and agree with him. I met my opposite number in Spain, Senor Flos Bassols, and the other four partner-Government equivalents a few weeks ago and we concurred with the view that, in the more worrying strategic environment, a first-class aircraft with the capabilities of the Eurofighter is needed for the defence of our country and Europe in the 21st century.

Belize

6. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the British garrison in Belize to discuss the future of the garrison.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I plan to visit the British garrison in Belize at the end of the month.

Mr. Gunnell: Will the Minister confirm that the recently announced decision to start withdrawing British troops from Belize was taken without the request or desire of the Belize Government? Does he also agree that the decision is precipitate and that the withdrawal will take place before Guatemala and Belize have reached full agreement? Does he accept that the decision does not represent a strategic move but the chaotic state of planning in his Department, whereby we have too few troops and too many roles and responsibilities for them to fulfil?

Mr. Hamilton: No, I do not accept at all what the hon. Gentleman says. Guatemala has now recognised Belize and our assessment of the security threats to Belize is that they are very low. In those circumstances, it is only right

that we review our commitment to having a battalion permanently based there. If we continue to take the view that we should have garrisons around the world which have been sent out to help and are then never withdrawn, the British Army will be very extended.

Mr. Garnier: When my right hon. Friend travels to Belize next month, may I suggest that he travels via East Midlands airport? In doing so, he will go past the Glen Parva Army records office which may be relocated in Scotland. If he travels to Belize via Leicestershire, will he take the opportunity to see the benefits for the Army of maintaining that records office in Leicestershire rather than moving it to Scotland? But if it is——

Madam Speaker: Order. That was a very good and amusing try by the hon. Gentleman. I shall be careful not to look his way for a very long time.

Mr. Hamilton: I admire my hon. Friend's ingenuity. On my way to Belize, I will certainly bear in mind the claims that my hon. Friend has made for some time for the Army records office to be in his constituency. As he knows, a proposal has now been made for Glasgow. Although we are going through a consultation period, I hope that it will end up with the decision that we have put forward.

Mr. Wareing: Is the Minister so sure that democracy in Guatemala will be enduring and that a real solution will be found to the territorial waters dispute, for example? All historical precedent is to the contrary. Does not he realise that the withdrawal of British forces from Belize not only provides the possibility for political instability in the area, but, because the presence of British forces produces 15 per cent. of the gross domestic product of Belize, is likely to undermine the economy of that country? What firm will invest in an insecure Belize?

Mr. Hamilton: Clearly, if we thought that there were unacceptable risks in the proposal, we should not put it forward. Our assessment of the position in the area and Guatemala's attitude towards Belize have enabled us to make the decision. Our high commissioner has assessed our contribution to the GDP of Belize to be no more than 3 to 4 per cent. I agree that that is a significant amount, but it is not as large as the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the security of a very small country in a highly unstable part of the world merits more than a written answer on policy two days ago and a flippant supplementary previously? Belize is the best place, apart from Brunei, for training in jungle warfare for Her Majesty's forces. The Belize defence force has no significant air force. Its neighbours are strong and prone to rapid changes in regime, and there is drug running. I do not believe that the Government have the support of the United States Administration. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that?

Mr. Hamilton: We shall continue training. We have been asked by the Belize Government to continue our training there and we shall continue to take advantage of the perfectly excellent facilities to which my hon. Friend alludes. Belize will have to look to regional arrangements to ensure its security in future. We have, of course, been in touch with the United States over this and we have kept it informed of what we are doing.

Mr. McWilliam: Will the Minister tell the House whether the group of people who advised him of the threat assessment to Belize were the same as those who advised his predecessor of the threat assessment to the Falklands in 1982?

Mr. Hamilton: No, things have changed since 1982. There are now different people giving similar advice.

Defence Exporters

7. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department gives directly and indirectly to British defence exporters.

Mr. Aitken: We give extensive advice and support to British defence exporters, mainly through the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Mr. Evans: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that if we had listened to the CND lunatics opposite, there would not be a defence industry at all? Will he confirm that we are not about to cut defence spending by 25 per cent. and that we are not about to wipe out the Royal Air Force? That is exactly what the lot opposite planned. Will he ask them once and for all, "Yes or no?"

Mr. Aitken: I always listen to my hon. Friend in preference to the CND types opposite, either current or old. I gladly confirm that we have absolutely no plans to make the savage cuts that my hon. Friend suggested the Labour party supported at its party conference. We believe that our defences are in good shape for many years to come.

Mrs. Mahon: On defence exports, how many dead or tortured East Timorese are acceptable to the Government in exchange for a defence contract with Indonesia?

Mr. Aitken: That is a ridiculous question. The British Government do not export arms of any type to any country without very careful export licensing. By means of our export licensing process, we seek to avoid the export of arms that could be used for the repression of individuals.

Nuclear Policy

8. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on Government nuclear defence policy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government intend that our independent nuclear deterrent should continue to provide the ultimate guarantee of our security, underpinning our defence strategy and providing a significant contribution to alliance deterrent forces.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to reassure the House that the Government's nuclear defence policy will remain firm and consistent, unlike that of the socialists opposite? Will my right hon. Friend also take this opportunity to say that the Government do not intend to follow the Labour party's lead yesterday when, once again, it changed its nuclear defence policy and said that it would leave this country undefended by negotiating away our minimum deterrent, while other countries remain nuclear powers?

Mr. Hamilton: At this point, I should make an apology to the House. At the last Defence Question Time, I said that the Opposition Front Bench had gone through a 180 deg turn on nuclear deterrence. That was clearly wrong. The Labour party had gone through a 360 deg turn on nuclear deterrence. It is alarming to me that only yesterday the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) talked about negotiating away our deterrent. I think that his only proviso was that the Labour party would not give Trident away for nothing. Personally, I do not find that very reassuring.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: As NATO's nuclear doctrine is now one of minimum deterrence, is it not time that the Government abandoned the strategic anachronism of the tactical air-to-surface missile and declared that when Trident is deployed it will carry no more warheads than the Polaris system which it is to replace?

Mr. Hamilton: That is asking two questions. The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that he will have to wait for an announcement on the tactical air-to-surface missile, or whatever replacement we choose for the WE177 system. No decision has been made on the number of warheads that will be carried by Trident, but I suspect that it will be more than those that we are carrying on Polaris.

Mr. David Atkinson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that last week's announcement by Mr. Aspin—that America is no longer to develop an orbital global missile defence system—is dangerously premature and complacent? Will my right hon. Friend ask him to think again?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes. What has changed is the American conception of the threat from Russia, but America is still very much involved in a theatre defence system which can be deployed against any errant nation that might want to fire off ballistic missiles. One should not assume that the whole of that programme has been abandoned. It has not. It has just been restricted to a theatre system.

Dr. Reid: Given the Minister's dislike of 360 deg turns, does he recall that it is now two years since I and other members of the Opposition Front Bench told him that it was absolute nonsense, in the face of the current threats, to spend £3 billion on a new tactical nuclear weapon while cutting the infantry? Now that he has done a 360 deg turn on the infantry and accepted that we were right, can he confirm that he is reviewing and preparing the ground for his second 360 deg turn by abandoning the tactical air-to-surface nuclear weapon referred to in the White Paper? Can he also confirm that the money that is saved by that abandonment and his correct 360 deg turn towards the policy of the Labour party will not be frittered by economic madness but will be ploughed into the infantry and the Territorial Army, which are needed by this country if it is to fulfil its present commitments?

Mr. Hamilton: I think that the hon. Gentleman suffers from a certain amount of overstatement in saying that the restoration of two infantry battalions is a 360 deg turn on the British Army. As usual, he is asking me to pre-empt the decision about the replacement for the WE177 nuclear bomb. I have made it clear that we shall not do so. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for an announcement.

Deregulation

9. **Mr. Pickles:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for encouraging deregulation within his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: My Department is enthusiastically supporting my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's deregulation initiative in a number of ways.

Mr. Pickles: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he recognise that small firms competing for bids face a disproportionate burden under regulations? Will he give an undertaking that, in considering deregulation, the special needs of small firms will be borne in mind?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend makes an entirely good and valid point. We wish to encourage small businesses to win defence contracts from the Ministry. We are simplifying our contracts procedure and the form filling that sometimes must accompany it, and I can tell new business seekers from the small business world that the small business group of the new suppliers' service exists to deal with their inquiries and to facilitate their efforts to win our contracts.

Mr. Cohen: What regulations will be deregulated? Will they be the low-flying regulations, the disciplinary regulations or the command structure regulations, or is this only an attack on low-paid workers such as the Ministry's cleaners and an attempt to replace guards at our defence establishments with those run by Group 4—in which case, God help our security?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman's lack of enthusiasm for defence matters is such that he might be the sort of Minister who would like to deregulate our disciplinary regulations and make our armed forces undisciplined. When I referred to deregulating, I was referring to business regulations and restrictions. The Ministry is not a regulator of business; nor are we responsible for any primary or secondary legislation. We are entering into the spirit of the deregulation initiative by getting rid of a number of over-complex, over-bureaucratic systems, such as unnecessarily irksome contract procedures, and are simplifying forms and so on. We are not entering the fantasy fields that the hon. Gentleman suggested.

Helicopters

10. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to place an order for attack helicopters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Yes, as I advised the House on 3 February, an invitation to tender for the supply of attack helicopters has been issued to potential bidders. It is our intention to acquire a complete weapons system, together with an associated support package.

Mr. Luff: I thank the Minister for that reply, but does he agree that one of the lessons of the Gulf war was the importance of flexible and mobile forces, including attack and support helicopters? In the context of the reply that he has just given and that comment, will he say how many attack helicopters he expects to order and when he will be in a position to confirm the six-year-old requirement for 25 EH101s in the support role for the Royal Air Force?

Mr. Aitken: I agree with my hon. Friend about the renewed emphasis that is needed in the aftermath of the Gulf war and about the need for greater mobility and flexibility in our weapons-carrying helicopters and support helicopters. I am reluctant to be drawn into great detail on the number of helicopters that we shall order because, to some extent, it must depend on the bids that we receive, but if I suggest a figure of about 100 attack helicopters, that is a reasonably clear signpost. I cannot confirm any order for support helicopters, but I am conscious of the remarks that were made to Parliament by previous Ministers.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister confirm that the internal study group in the Ministry of Defence is considering the subject of attack helicopters and the carriers from which they might fly? Does the Ministry intend ever to procure a helicopter carrier or any other warship from Swan Hunter on Tyneside?

Mr. Aitken: We all share the hon. Gentleman's sadness about the events at Swan Hunter. However, a contract was put forward and won fairly in open competition by the competing yard, VSEL. It is not for me to say what future Swan Hunter in receivership may have. That depends on the new ownership, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as the receivers confirm, my Department is taking a positive and constructive approach towards its current problems.

United Nations Forces

11. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Nations peacekeeping efforts around the world are currently assisted by British forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom is currently providing forces for United Nations operations in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Cyprus, Cambodia, the western Sahara and on the Iraq-Kuwait border. More than 3,500 personnel are committed to those operations.

Mr. Hague: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, wherever in the world British peacekeeping forces have been deployed, they have shown the highest possible standards of fairness, restraint and general professionalism? Are they not a great credit to the country? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Britain's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping forces is now one of the most extensive and generous of any country in the world?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, indeed. We are running second only to the French in the number of troops we have deployed. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about their being professional troops. So many of our European colleagues still have conscription; therefore, we have a great advantage. The experience of our troops in Northern Ireland means that they are some of the most professional —if not the most professional—troops that can be deployed on peacekeeping forces. That is one of the reasons why people want them all the time.

Dr. Godman: Given that United Nations peacekeeping operations are likely to increase rather than decrease over the next few years, may I remind the Minister that British infantry soldiers make excellent United Nations peacekeeping soldiers? With that in mind, will he ensure that the Scottish infantry regiments are not further run down, thereby damaging our commitment to those essential United Nations peacekeeping activities?

Mr. Hamilton: As I made clear earlier, we are always keeping force levels under review. The hon. Gentleman will know that, although it is not a United Nations commitment, we have been involved in a peacekeeping operation of a sizeable proportion in Northern Ireland, where we now have some 19,000 troops. Of course, the main onus of that falls on the Army. That is the biggest peacekeeping activity in which we are involved and it therefore makes it more difficult for us to be involved in any future United Nations operations.

I think that the burden of peacekeeping in Europe should be shared more by our European partners. I am very encouraged by the progress being made in changes in the constitution and deployment of professional forces who may be able to carry some of the burden as well.

Falkland Islands

12. **Mr. Sweeney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to visit the Falkland Islands to discuss the activities of the British garrison there.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence visited the Falkland Islands in March and was fully briefed on the activities of the garrison. He also had meetings with the governor and the councillors.

Mr. Sweeney: Can my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the Government will maintain their commitment to the Falkland Islands? Does he agree that the plan produced by the Labour party to cut £6 billion from the defence budget would jeopardise that?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, indeed. I can certainly confirm our firm commitment to the defence of the Falkland Islands. Despite improving relationships with Argentina, we have to maintain a garrison there which is certainly worthy of the name. I share my hon. Friend's concern about the idea of cutting the defence budget put forward by Labour party conferences year after year. That would have a dramatic effect on our defence capability, not least in the Falklands.

Bosnia

13. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British ground forces are stationed in Bosnia.

14. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the contribution of British troops to securing peace in Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The actual numbers of British armed forces personnel deployed to the former Yugoslavia in support of United Nations operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina fluctuate daily. On 16 May, however, there were 2,082 personnel, including 90 personnel from the Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm.

British troops have made a great contribution to the vital humanitarian aid operation which has alleviated the suffering of thousands.

Mr. Madden: Although everyone congratulates the British forces on the way in which they have performed

their duties in Bosnia, does the Minister agree that the international community might have adopted a more decisive, interventionist policy had the main aggressors in Bosnia been Muslim and the main victims non-Muslim?

Mr. Hamilton: I do not accept that at all. The reason for a certain amount of hesitance to involve ground troops in an offensive action in Bosnia is that whoever went in would be embroiled in a civil war. That is why the international community has shown a reluctance about going into Bosnia before a ceasefire is established.

Mr. Congdon: Given the valuable humanitarian role being carried out by our troops in Bosnia, will my right hon. Friend confirm that great caution will be exercised before agreeing to further military intervention that might put our troops at risk?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, indeed. As I have said, it is important that a clear ceasefire is in being and then, if it is a question of monitoring that ceasefire, I think we will be more encouraged to commit further troops. Until the Vance-Owen plan has been signed and a ceasefire agreed, we are very reluctant to get further involved.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Gorman: Has my right hon. Friend, in his busy schedule, had time to see a report of the National Consumer Council about international trade, which states that the dice are loaded against the consumer by the European Commission trade barriers and regulations which are costing billions of pounds extra every year, including £230 on a car, or £750 if it is imported into the Community, more than £1·2 billion extra on electronic goods and £17 per week on my grocery bill every time I push my trolley around Tesco? *[Interruption.]* Yes, and Norma. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House and, more important, consumers outside the House that he will stamp on that tremendous waste and tell the European Community to put its house in order? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister.

Mrs. Gorman: I have not finished yet.

Madam Speaker: As far as I am concerned, the hon. Lady has finished.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that reducing trade barriers does lead to lower prices and economic growth. That is why, above all, we want to get the negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade completed—to bring down tariffs and barriers in order to increase trade to the benefit of both the industrialised and the non-industrialised world. As to the European Community, to which my hon. Friend made passing mention, the single market should remove trade barriers within the Community. I very much hope that it will live up to its expectations. It was a British initiative, negotiated by a British Prime Minister and concluded by a British Prime Minister.

Mr. John Smith: May I, on behalf of the Opposition, express our whole-hearted sympathy to the parents and families of the victims of Beverly Allitt? Does the Prime Minister appreciate the full extent of the anger and apprehension among parents throughout the nation at the fact that it was possible in one of our hospitals for a nurse with a known psychiatric disorder to destroy the lives of children in her care? In view of the appalling negligence which has obviously occurred, why have the Government refused to have a full public inquiry, with the powers to require the evidence of witnesses to be given on oath and to compel the disclosure of all documents?

The Prime Minister: First, may I say that I share the right hon. and learned Gentleman's sympathy for the parents. I know that that view is echoed across the House. The main thing about this inquiry—and this, too, will be generally shared—is to have one that will be most likely to get at the truth and to ensure that, in the future, there is no likelihood of a repetition. We take the view that the inquiry to be conducted by Sir Cecil Clothier is likely to be the most effective. Sir Cecil has taken the view—this is an important matter for the House to consider—and said this afternoon:

> "In my view, people will be more willing to speak frankly to my inquiry than to a public inquiry."

I share that view and I believe that, on that basis, it is right to proceed with the inquiry under the chairmanship of Sir Cecil.

Mr. Smith: No one doubts the competence or integrity of Sir Cecil Clothier, but how can he know whether people will be willing to give evidence? Surely, in the public interest, we should have an inquiry with the fullest powers. Does the Prime Minister not take into account the fact that the parents of the children concerned and the majority of the nursing staff want a full public inquiry so that nothing can be concealed? What is wrong with such a reasonable request?

The Prime Minister: Sir Cecil has agreed to see the parents of the children, and that is welcome— *[Interruption.]* If Sir Cecil wishes to have further powers, he will come back and seek them from the Government, and we will provide them. I must tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that Sir Cecil, as a former Parliamentary Commissioner for Health, not only commands the confidence of the House but has a great deal of experience in this area. I am happy to accept his judgment on what is the most appropriate way to carry out the inquiry that he is set to chair.

I must also tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman —because I know that he will regard this as important, too —that there has already been a lengthy public trial which has brought many of the key facts to light. There has been an independent inquiry into the quality of management. In addition, Sir Cecil is now heading an independent inquiry into events at the hospital. If he needs further powers, he will come and ask us for them.

Mr. Smith: Should not the nature of the powers be a matter for the Government's responsibility, not a matter

for Sir Cecil Clothier? Was not the trial concerned with quite different issues than what is concerned here—*[Interruption.]*—and is it not inappropriate——

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: Is it not inappropriate—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Smith: Is it not inappropriate for the inquiry to be set up and to be asked to report to the very regional health authority whose own actions may be a subject of the inquiry? Is it not totally unsatisfactory, as a solicitor for the parents has pointed out, that the Secretary of State for Health has apparently given more weight to the wishes of the health authority than to those of the parents of the children? *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I believe that, on reflection, the right hon. and learned Gentleman might be ashamed of some of the things he just said. We want a rigorous and swift inquiry. We want an inquiry that will deal with the most important aspect of all, which is one that gets at the truth, not one that just raises party political points. My right hon. Friend has established such an inquiry—*[Interruption.]*—and she has appointed to head it someone with unique experience of the nature of the events. That man who is heading the inquiry has himself said that he believes that the people attending it will be more willing to speak freely to his inquiry than to a public inquiry. I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not accept that advice.

Q2. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hendry: In between the cheap jibes of Opposition Members, has my right hon. Friend had a chance to see the report into the future of local government in Derbyshire published yesterday? Is he aware of the massive local opposition to the proposal that the whole county should be divided into two vast unitary authorities? Does he share the view of Conservative Members that local government should be as close as possible to the people it represents and that there is not, and never could be, any shared sense of community between my constituents and those in Chesterfield or, dare I say it, Bolsover?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that, as far as possible, the structure of local government should reflect local tradition and a local sense of community. That is, of course, one of the main points of the present inquiry. With regard to the Derbyshire inquiry, as my hon. Friend says, the Local Government Commission preference is for two unitary authorities. However, I understand that it has also put forward alternative solutions. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will take the opportunity to make his views clear to the commission.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Government's policy of encouraging the reduction in the payment of benefits across post office counters will, it is calculated, result in the closure of up to 5,000 local rural post offices? Will the Prime Minister tell the House that he is now prepared to reconsider that foolish policy?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman thinks of a number and then doubles it for domestic consumption. I am surprised that he raises that matter today. I direct him to the answer that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs gave in the House a day or so ago. He said, for the avoidance of doubt,

"we are . . . committed to the maintenance of a viable network of post offices",

including rural post offices. Pensioners will continue to be able to receive their pensions from the post office. We have encouraged them to make payments into their banks on a voluntary basis. But it is

"not Government policy to remove the right of pensioners to receive their pensions from the post office."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1993, Vol. 224, c. 1035.]

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this year's public expenditure review is likely to be one of the toughest on record and that any restraint there must be in public expenditure must be shared to the fullest extent by local authorities as well as by Whitehall? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that local authorities would be wise to plan on the basis of no real growth in expenditure for the next financial year and that the Government are prepared to back up their policies by the fullest use of their capping powers?

The Prime Minister: We certainly have to consider the range of public expenditure, both centrally and for local government, in the public expenditure discussions that will begin very shortly. Those discussions will be concluded soon and we will make our views known to local authorities and others. On the general principle, my hon. Friend is clearly right to believe that we need to restrain public expenditure in the interests of the economy as a whole.

Q3. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Prime Minister aware of the serious and grave concern of all housing associations about the cut in Government resources for affordable housing? Is he also aware that if that policy continues, rents will rise sky high and people will not be able to afford housing? Is he prepared to listen to housing associations in relation to their concerns about affordable housing and will he also listen to local authorities which have the resources, finances and ability to provide affordable housing?

The Prime Minister: We have not in the past only listened to the Housing Corporation and to housing associations; we have acted on the basis of what they have had to say to us. In 1992-93, we spent more than £2·3 billion on the Housing Corporation, £350 million or so through estate action and more than £1·6 billion through local authorities. We have also provided specific help for the homeless, with nearly £100 million over the past three financial years and £86 million made available over the next three financial years. As a result of the measures that we have taken throughout the past decade, there are more home owners than ever before; council tenants have more

control over their own estates—I know that that is not popular with Opposition Members—the use of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for homeless people has been cut by 38 per cent.; the rise in mortgage repossessions has been reversed; and the number of people sleeping rough in central London has more than halved. Why did the hon. Gentleman mention none of that?

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Italian people got it absolutely right when they rejected proportional representation through the ballot box? Does he believe that those people who are rather cynically toying with the idea are doing that simply because it is the only way in which they will get their sticky little fingers on the levers of power?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend about that, and I know that I have a lot of support on the Opposition Benches for that particular view. Last year, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said:

"Any move on electoral reform by Labour would be interpreted as defeatist."

Q4. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Prime Minister now tell the House which of the technical reasons that make it impossible to privatise Northern Ireland water within the lifetime of this Parliament do not apply to Scotland?

The Prime Minister: We are still considering the consultation in Scotland, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I think that it is better to reply after we have considered all the consultation.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Britain has been entirely right to reject calls for further substantial military action in the Bosnian region? Such action would lead to guerrilla warfare, substantial loss of life and—given recent comments—bomb outrages on the streets of London without any furtherance of the peacemaking process or helping to find a permanent solution to the problem.

The Prime Minister: There are many complex difficulties to be solved in the particular problems faced in Bosnia. I believe that the stance that we have taken, which has been shared by many of our allies, has been entirely the right stance in Bosnia. We continue to work with our allies towards a series of objectives. I hope that we will soon be able to bring permanent peace to that area.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to seek your help and protection. I tabled a question for written answer yesterday to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the number of integrated administration and control scheme forms that were received before the deadline on Saturday. The answer that I was given, which is in the *Official Report*, was in terms of simple generality—no figures whatever were given. I asked my office to communicate with the Minister's office to see whether a mistake had been made, and figures were still not available.

Within a matter of minutes of that being raised, I understand that the figures were made available to people outside the House, including the media. Not only did the figures appear this morning on "Farming Today", which was recorded within a matter of minutes of my question being answered, but others outside the House have received detailed figures. I submit that this is yet another example of arrogant contempt from the Minister for the House, and I seek your protection.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will understand that, of course, I cannot comment on the adequacy or otherwise of ministerial answers to questions. However, if information has been made available to the media—the hon. Gentleman tells me that it has, and I must accept his word for it—which has not been given to the House, I certainly would deprecate such action. In the light of what the hon. Gentleman tells me, he might like to take the matter further with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, or perhaps seek to catch my eye during the spring Adjournment debate so that he can raise the matter more fully across the floor of the House.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order refers to *Hansard* of 29 April, when the Secretary of State for Scotland gave a reply to a private notice question on cervical screen testing at Inverclyde hospital. At the time, I was assured that none of my constituents were involved. Indeed, the Secretary of State said that the matter was so urgent that it had to be cleared up straight away. Today, I received a press release from the same health board saying that my constituents are involved. In a meeting that I had with the board on 29 April, no mention whatever was made of that.

Given that it is now three weeks since that statement and the fact that public concern has been aroused yet again, and in the light of the Secretary of State's previous remarks, I ask you whether an opportunity has been made available for the Secretary of State and his Department to make a ministerial statement further to his answers to the private notice question on Thursday 29 April.

Madam Speaker: I have not been informed by the Minister that any further statement is to be made in the House.

Upwards-only Rent Review Clauses (Abolition)

3.33 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish upwards-only rent review clauses in commercial leases; and for connected purposes.

To the uninitiated, the subject matter of the Bill may sound rather obtuse and dry. However, it is of profound importance to the micro-economies of all our constituencies.

Most commercial and retail properties are leased. The type of commercial lease currently used for most shops and offices has its origins in the mists of time, but leases are now regulated by the Landlord and Tenant Act 1984 and are in a fairly standard form, which is widely used across the country. Apart from the usual protection of the landlord and the tenant, the key features of the English commercial lease are that it runs for anything between 10 and 25 years, and that the rent is set at the outset.

However, as market rents over a long period are hard to predict, leases also provide for a review every three to five years to reflect changes in the market. If rents in the local vicinity have risen, the tenant will have the rent raised at his rent review to reflect the local market conditions.

A rational person would expect rents to fall if the market has fallen. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Since the 1960s, an insidious clause has been introduced into commercial leases, the effect of which is that, at the review, the rent can never go down, but can only go up. It is called an upwards-only rent review clause, and it is in wide use. To anyone with the barest understanding of economics, it is obvious that there is a conflict between the requirements that rents be set at a market level and that they only go upwards.

The House may wonder why the matter has not been brought to its attention before. The answer is simple. Since the clauses were introduced in the 1960s, the market has always been rising, so the inconsistency has never caused a problem until now. Commercial leases currently undergoing review had their last review in the late 1980s, when market rents were at an astronomical high. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning) said in her Adjournment debate last November, demand for commercial properties far exceeded supply in the 1980s. Between 1985 and 1990, rents rocketed by no less than 145 per cent., when the increase in the retail prices index was just 33 per cent.

Likewise, office rents were subject to similar increases. As an illustration, the high water mark of office rents was probably set by Messrs. Saatchi and Saatchi, who rented their headquarters in Berkeley square at £68 per square foot. That set a precedent in the west end, which led to spectacularly high rents in all the surrounding properties. But since then, the market has plummeted. The current tenants of Saatchi's building are now sub-letting empty space at £35 per square foot and making up the difference out of their own pocket.

Opposition Members may feel that that could not happen to a better company. However, not only the smart offices of Mayfair are affected. Some small shopkeepers in Croydon are going out of business because such high rents are demanded of them. I am sure that all hon. Members have heard similar stories in their constituencies.

The quarterly survey of small business in Britain, published by the Small Business Research Trust, states that probably more than 250,000 firms are now locked into agreements which allow no downward flexibility in rent. That fact alone has a significant impact on the economy, and it brings me to my central point: that such clauses should be abolished, for the simple reason that they distort the operation of a free market.

How can a shopkeeper compete with a new tenant who moves into empty property next door paying current low rents, while he is bound by high rents set at the height of the boom in the late 1980s? A market that permits an upward ratchet of prices but does not allow them to fall is a distortion. It cannot be in the national interest.

Some may argue that the Bill is contrary to the right of parties to negotiate freely the terms of their lease. Some may argue that people can sit in the landlord's office for a cosy chat and ask to have the onerous clause omitted. First, anyone who has had to negotiate a commercial lease in recent years will probably say, "Tell that to the Marines." For decades it has been a landlords' market. Any attempt to renegotiate a lease is simply met with the response, "Take it or leave it".

Secondly, we have introduced many laws to ensure the operation of a free market. Those measures include the abolition of retail price maintenance, the restrictive trade practices legislation and the anti-monopoly laws and the establishment of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. We have given many powers to the Office of Fair Trading. The House has not hesitated to ensure the fair operation of a free market, and should not do so now.

Some people may say that bankers are less likely to lend money for property development if they feel that the rental income will fall, but that is a fallacious argument. There is little point in businesses being driven to bankruptcy by the operation of such clauses when they are manifestly seen not to have worked. A constituent recently came to see me. He ran a small tobacconist shop in Coulsdon and said that he could not continue in business at the present rent when rivals could open up in the empty shops next door at a fraction of the cost——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Tories.

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman says that it is being done by Tories, but it is happening in his constituency as well. Is it in the best interests of the banks, tenants or general public? The excessive rents that many businesses are paying are both inflationary and a cause of continued business failure. They have failed in their sole original function to guarantee rents to the landlords and their bankers.

It is important that we learn valuable lessons from the recession, so that it may lead to a sustained recovery. I believe that the abolition of upwards-only rent review clauses in commercial leases will be beneficial to the future economic health of this country. That is why I seek the leave of the House to introduce the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Richard Ottaway, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. David Congdon, Dr. Robert Spink, Mr. Michael Stern, Mr. John Townend and Mr. John Watts.

Upwards-only Rent Review Clauses (Abolition)

Mr. Richard Ottaway accordingly presented a Bill to abolish upwards-only rent review clauses in commercial leases; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 July, and to be printed. [Bill 198.]

Adjournment (Spring)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 27th May, do adjourn until Monday 7th June.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

3.42 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I always think that this is a useful debate, and I speak in it with great regularity. I see that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has a wry smile on his face; he probably knows what is coming.

I spoke in the Easter Adjournment debate on 1 April and mentioned two subjects, one of which was the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I am delighted that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has taken some action. He has shown that he has listened to what people are saying. As my right hon. and learned Friend knows because he has been in politics a long time, there are times when one simply cannot win. Some people are saying not that my right hon. and learned Friend listened to what they were saying, but that the Government have done a U-turn.

The second subject that I mentioned on 1 April I shall raise again today, as I promised on that occasion that I would continue to speak about it until something was done: the vexed question of the South Trafford community hospital. When he replied on 1 April, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that he understood that I was going to see the Secretary of State for Health. I saw her on 21 April, and made my views known to her. I asked her if she would intercede and stress to the North Western regional health authority how essential that project was.

It is a facility for which we have waited for many years. I should like to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend to an article in the *Sale & Altrincham Messenger* on 7 May. it was headlined: "Future health looks bleak says Labour", and said:

"The outlook for future hospital care in Trafford is 'bleak and unsatisfactory' according to Broadheath Ward Labour Party. At a recent meeting, Trafford Community Health Council representative Ray Holden said a new community hospital for the south of the borough was still a dream."

The sad thing is that Broadheath Labour party is like its big brothers and sisters in the Labour party, and thrives on doom and gloom. It does not greet any good news with joy.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): On the topic of gloom and doom, perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to tell me what good news the Conservative party has brought to Tyneside in the last week.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: The hon. Gentleman knows that I come from Tyneside, and of course I am sorry about what is happening there. He also knows as well as I do that what is bad news on the Tyne is very good news indeed in Barrow. Unfortunately, the tender from the yard on Tyneside was not as low as the one from Barrow. I hope very much that something will be done, because I have a great admiration for that shipyarad, as the hon. Gentleman knows. Now, with his permission, I will continue.

It would be very good news if we got a community hospital in our area. Strangely enough, on 7 May I had a letter from somebody who signed his or herself "K. Riley", without saying whether it was Mr. or Mrs. When I wrote a letter to the address at the top of the paper, it was returned to me marked "Not known at this address". The thing that caused me great concern was that K. Riley wrote as follows:

"I am writing to Virginia Bottomley to tell her that we do not want, or need, 'a New Community hospital'—we have already got a perfectly satisfactory one, plus St. Anne's, which is under-used and could quite easily house more elderly people."

I really despair of people like that, who simply do not understand the problems in our area.

Of course, Altrincham general hospital has provided excellent care over many years. In 1978, I had my gall bladder removed there. It is an excellent hospital, and certainly I could not have had better care. But we also have to face the fact that there are several disadvantages at that site, particularly the difficulty of providing care for elderly people. The health authority in Trafford has stated:

"The layout of the wards and the availability of rehabilitation services is not conducive to modern medical practice and can be remedied by a new building. Car parking for visitors and staff is very difficult at Altrincham General Hospital particularly on market days. There is no room for expansion and it is planned that in the new Community Hospital facilities currently inappropriately provided at Sale & Brooklands and St. Anne's Hospital would all be moved on to this site. A much improved environment with all the back up facilities would be available in purpose built accommodation. Additionally, the running costs would be much lower than in a new building than the existing one which would enable rationalisation of items such as having only one boilerhouse rather than the present three for the three separate hospitals. This would release much needed monies for reinvestment in providing healthcare services for Trafford."

I hope that my right hon. Friend will tell the Secretary of State for Health to ignore the solitary complaint from the mysterious K. Riley, who could not even give the correct address. A new community hospital would be popular in my constituency and would provide a much-needed facility. I reiterate what I said in the debate on 1 April, on capital schemes since 1980, that Trafford is the only district in the whole of the north-west that has not had a large capital project.

The second issue that I want to touch on briefly is affordable housing, which I raised in an Adjournment debate on 26 April. Housing associations throughout the country are concerned by the proposed cuts in grant rates. Housing associations are now the main providers of new homes for people with low incomes. If the Government provision of 72 per cent. of capital cost of new housing association funds drops to 55 per cent. in the period 1995-96, I fear that it will create tremendous problems, because the poorest members of society who are now being housed in the newest social housing will find themselves in a poverty trap. The rents will be so high that they will be dependent upon benefit, and it will not be worth their while to take jobs. I wonder whether that is the sort of society that we want to encourage.

I am also concerned about elderly people who have been thrifty during their working lives, because, under the rules, with capital of between £3,000 and £16,000, a notional amount of interest is assumed at the rate of £1 per week for every £250 capital. I wish that somebody would give me that sort of interest on my savings. It is ridiculously high, and a disincentive to saving.

I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could say whether the Department of the Environment has reached any decision yet on housing association grant rates. I do

not want people to be penalised because they want to work; and I certainly do not want the elderly to be penalised for their thrift.

That brings me to my final point. Like every other hon. Member, I have been inundated during the past week by letters from elderly people who are terrified because they have been told that they cannot collect their pensions and benefits from post offices and sub-post offices. They believe that they will be forced to use what is called automatic credit transfer to receive their pensions.

I understand that the Department of Social Security has run a pilot scheme to encourage pensioners to use ACT to have their pensions paid directly into a bank or building society account. That has caused enormous problems. Under the scheme, 24,000 people soon to collect their pensions for the first time have been sent letters advising them of collection arrangements. The first 8,000 letters point out the advantages of using a bank or building society but include the option of using a post office. Another 8,000 give advice only about banks and building societies; those interested in post offices have to send away for further information. The final 8,000 give no option besides direct payments into bank or building society accounts.

This is just not good enough. I have always believed that this Government believe in choice. If people want to use ACT, so be it—it is more secure and a more reliable means of payment—but we must bear in mind the elderly people who do not have bank or building society accounts.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the fears that they are expressing? They like to go to their post office or sub-post office every week to collect their pensions. In letter after letter, they stress the kindness that they receive from people in sub-post offices, who keep an eye on them. If a regular face does not appear one week, no doubt someone in the post office will do something about it. The human touch is missing from automatic credit transfer.

I ask my right hon. Friend to make it crystal clear that people still have the choice, thereby allaying the anxieties of many elderly people who are confused and worried about how they will collect their pensions. I hope that he will make the Secretary of State for Social Security aware that the emphasis in the pilot scheme on automatic credit transfer was too great and that not enough importance was attached to post offices.

Before we adjourn for the spring recess, I hope that my right hon. Friend will give me satisfactory answers on these three issues.

3.52 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I wish to raise two distinct topics, which could perhaps be woven together under the theme of law and order. The first is the case of Nurse Beverly Allitt and the killings at Grantham hospital. I listened carefully to the Prime Minister at Question Time, but I do not think that what he said went to the heart of the anxieties that ordinary parents must be feeling.

For parents of small children it is frightening to think that the latter might have their lives endangered in a children's ward of a hospital. If there is one place they might expect their children to be safe, it would be there. The Prime Minister focused on the legal aspects of the case at the expense of parents' real fears. Both times, when questioned by the Leader of the Opposition, he referred to what Sir Cecil Clothier wanted. What is important, however, is what parents want. As they read the press reports, they must be wanting reassurance, and they can only get that from a public inquiry that is not accountable to the regional health authority.

Many of the parents involved in the case and many other parents who have seen the media coverage of the case must be asking how someone with a history of mental instability came to be hired as a children's nurse—the more so given that she had attended the casualty department of the same hospital for physical injuries arising from that mental instability. Why was she hired? Did it have anything to do with the desperate shortage of paediatric nurses? Why was action not taken earlier, when it was evident that a series of babies were either dying or being hurt by unknown causes?

To focus on the legalistic and technical aspects while ignoring parents' real fears does not do the matter justice. The parents whose babies died—indeed, every parent of a small child—will not be satisfied until the Government announces a full public inquiry. I am glad to have had the opportunity to raise the matter this afternoon.

The second issue strictly concerns my constituency—the problem of prostitution in the Stamford Hill area. It is difficult to raise the issue of prostitution in a Chamber where more than 600 hon. Members are male, because for most of them prostitution is either a trivial issue or a joke——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Or a service.

Ms Abbott: That is right.

But thousands of people who live in residential areas, whether in parts of Hackney, south London, Manchester or Liverpool, are seriously affected by the problem of prostitution and the consequent problems of streetwalking and pimps. In the parts of London with which I am familiar, the problem is reaching epidemic proportions.

The problems are complex. Almost any woman can be harassed. It could be a woman walking along the street, going to or from her home. In my area of Stamford Hill, even women taking children to school at 9 o'clock in the morning are propositioned. It is a serious harassment—*[Interruption.]* It is a serious problem——

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Tory Members do not think so.

Ms Abbott: My hon. Friend is right. The problem causes not just embarrassment, but fear. I know that that is a joke to Conservative Members, but it is not a joke for women or for Labour Members. Ordinary women taking their children to school are propositioned by men—*[Interruption.]* I know that it is a difficult issue to raise, especially if one is a woman in a largely male-dominated Chamber. I insist on being allowed to discuss the matter this afternoon, because that is what my constituents want.

Mr. Tony Banks: This is indeed a very serious subject, and I am sure that the majority of hon. Members present this afternoon will take it seriously. My hon. Friend is raising an important issue about kerb crawling and harassment of women by men looking for prostitutes. Does she think that the legalisation of brothels might be one way to deal with the problem? I ask that question in a general and genuine sense of an inquiry.

Ms Abbott: A number of options must be considered if we are successfully to deal with the problem and I shall discuss those in a moment. I want to spell out for Conservative Members, who tend to trivialise the issue, what problems are faced by those who live in areas where prostitution is rife.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Lady is making some party political points. Does she recall that, during the last Parliament, our former Conservative colleague Mr. Shelton tried to introduce a Bill to deal with the problem, but it was talked out by the hon. Lady's colleague, the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone)?

Ms Abbott: I remember that, and it is one reason why I have taken the trouble to raise the matter this afternoon. I hope that hon. Members on both sides will listen to my remarks about what is a very serious problem that faces people not just in my constituency but in many others.

The first problem caused by prostitution is the harassment of women going about their business, not just in the evening but during the day.

The other problem caused by prostitution is that people can be woken by noise and commotion in the middle of the night. There are areas in my constituency where five or six prostitutes gather on street corners—and these are not necessarily the most rundown parts, but residential areas. People are woken at 2 and 3 am to see groups of prostitutes on the corner of their street. People wake up in the morning to find litter left by prostitutes in pursuance of their business.

In one of the main thoroughfares for streetwalkers in my constituency, there is a block of sheltered accommodation. Old people there get up in the morning to find that, because prostitutes have been carrying out their business in the hallways and doorways, they are littered with syringes and used condoms. It is easy to turn that into a joke, but it is not a joke. Old people who are upset and alarmed by that come to see me.

There are also the serious problems attendant on prostitution—of crime, violence, drugs and the pimps who hang around and are parasitical upon the trade. Therefore, prostitution is not trivial. It brings with it the problems of harassment, violence, crime and drugs for the local community.

I stress that, although I am talking about prostitution, the men who frequent prostitutes, the kerb crawlers and customers, are just as culpable as the prostitutes. I would not pursue any line of argument that focused only on the girls, and women—and boys in some cases—and excluded their customers. We must also focus on the kerb crawlers and the men who frequent the prostitutes.

A few years ago, at a meeting with the Home Secretary, I suggested that the Metropolitan police should do what has been done for some time in places outside London, and write to men who are frequently found kerb crawling. At that point, the Home Secretary rejected the idea, but the Metropolitan police have now taken it up and it has had the effect of embarrassing some of the men, many of them —it goes without saying, but I shall say it none the less —respectable married men who are found kerb crawling and looking for girls.

It is also important to say that part of the rising tide of prostitution has to do with economic pressures which many working-class women face. Men, being men, like to fantasise about what turns women to prostitution. I, being a women, want to stress that it is economic necessity that turns most women to prostitution. No one would seek to earn a living in that way, subject as prostitutes are, every day of their working lives, to threats of violence, abuse and physical harassment, if they were not forced to do so by economic necessity.

Many girls have gone down the road of prostitution in order to supplement their social security and to feed their children, only to find themselves trapped by the violence of their pimps or by a drug habit that has been deliberately induced in them. In addition to thinking about the problems of local residents, we should think about the lives that some of those women lead and in which they are trapped.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) talked about possible remedies. A range of remedies exists for the House to consider. The police should have more resources in order to clear the streets and deal with the prostitutes. There might well be a case for changing the law. For example, Birmingham city council has explored the possibility of toleration zones with almost semi-legalised prostitution. There is also the possibility of toughening up the law on kerb crawling.

I do not seek this afternoon to put any particular proposal before the House, I simply say that street-walking is not a trivial issue. It is a serious matter for residents in areas affected by prostitution and the Members of Parliament who represent them. We should think of all who are suffering—the residents and the girls who are trapped in prostitution. I should like the House before too long to debate the issue and to arrive at some serious legislative proposals. As a result, I hope that at least the Stamford Hill area of Hackney, North and Stoke Newington will become a prostitute-free zone.

4.3 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I am sure that anyone who listened to that powerful plea from the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) would warmly agree. She must not fall into the error of supposing that Conservative Members take a different line. She mentioned an important subject and did so passionately and eloquently, and I echo almost everything that she said. I sincerely hope that her area is soon a prostitute-free zone.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) touched on a popular topic, which I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will note is felt to be important by hon. Members on both sides of the House. It would be quite wrong for elderly people to feel obliged to receive their pensions through automatic credit transfer, but the threat that that would pose to sub-post offices, and to rural sub-post offices in particular, is even more important. That is not the main subject of my remarks, but I want my right hon. Friend to know that my hon. Friend was speaking for many hon. Members in all parts of the House.

I shall briefly touch on two subjects—the first is international and the second more national. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will hardly be surprised that, once again, I want briefly to mention Bosnia. I appeal to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to discuss with our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister whether this country should take more of an

initiative. I say that not in a critical spirit but because the conflicting and uncertain sounds from across the Atlantic have been confusing to many people.

This country is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council—a role which makes this country a great power, although we are often far too nervous and diffident about admitting it. Our membership of the Security Council and of the Group of Seven and our pivotal position within Europe, which I hope will be strengthened by the end of this week, all make this country a great power. At a time when other countries are diffident about taking an initiative, perhaps because of internal problems or their leaders' lack of experience, we can exercise leadership and I regret that during the past two years we have been a little diffident about doing so. Frankly, I believe that if the calls that I and others made in the autumn of 1991 had been heeded, much bloodshed might have been avoided and many tragic events might never have taken place.

Be that as it may, the killing goes on and the problem is still acute. I urge my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to ask the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary after this debate whether Great Britain can summon a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the five permanent members of the Security Council in London—there is a conflict about what might or might not have been proposed for New York on Friday—to discuss Bosnia and the Balkan question.

As I promised, I was brief on that subject and I shall now concentrate on a national matter that concerns me and many other hon. Members on both sides of the House. I was prompted to take part in this debate—I am grateful to you for calling me, Madam Speaker—because during Prime Minister's Question Time my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) referred to the Banham commission and its first recommendations for local government reform and reorganisation in Derbyshire.

The preferred solution of Sir John Banham and his commission—that the county should be divided into two maxi-district councils—has not caused delight among Members of Parliament and councillors representing Derbyshire. There has been so much upheaval in local government in recent years and so many financial and other changes, for goodness' sake let us be cautious, let us not embark on a great scheme of reforms, particularly in the teeth of local opposition.

My district council of South Staffordshire has been watching with nervous apprehension as Banham has concluded his deliberations in Derbyshire. We are on the list to be looked at in November and rumours have been circulating which have now been confirmed. The district councils in Staffordshire, certainly my own, would very much like to be unitary authorities. I strongly support my district council's wish to be a unitary authority. If existing district councils were able to become unitary authorities or if there were a strong local desire to amalgamate with a neighbour to become a local authority, and if such moves made local government more directly accountable to the people—fine. I should not oppose that and my district council would be overjoyed.

I believe—obviously I am biased—that my council's record of prudence and good management is excellent. We have the lowest council tax in Staffordshire, just as we had the lowest community charge, yet we have good services. My council's record earns it the right to unitary status. If the Government do not regard that as a possibility, we do not want to be tampered with. We want our boundaries to remain as they are and we want the county boundaries to remain as they are.

If unitary status cannot be conferred on authorities the size of South Staffordshire, let us keep the status quo. Let us keep the county boundaries and the district boundaries. By all means let us consider specific functions, and let us reapportion them to some degree and give greater control to districts, but let us not be driven into amalgamation with districts with which we do not have a great deal in common and with which we do not want to be amalgamated. That is a strongly felt view.

From conversation, I know that that view is strongly felt not only in Staffordshire, but in the House and in the country generally because we have been through many changes. We do not want to go through more which will result in an even remoter system of local government. The great argument for unitary authorities was that there would be not only greater accountability, but less remoteness because the county tier would be removed. That argument is transformed and put on its head if we are to have enormously large district councils.

Such a change would be wasteful in a variety of ways. It would be wasteful of buildings. When South Staffordshire came into being in the early 1970s following the first great round—"great" may not be the right word—of local government reform in 1972, a new council headquarters was created which had to be enlarged when the community charge was introduced. If we had a maxi-district and if we were linked with two or three of the neighbouring authorities, many of which had done similar things, we should not be able to maintain all the council headquarters. It is not sufficient to say that the buildings could be sold for commercial use, because they are not always fit for such use and there is not always a demand for such buildings.

I tell my right hon. Friend with great feeling that such an amalgamation would also be wasteful of people. It would be wasteful of the elected councillors. There would not be so many of them and there would be fewer councillors representing more people, so there would be greater remoteness. A blow would be struck at the ideal of local service which is so important a motivating force in local government.

It is important to realise that there would also be a severe blow to the motivation, morale and career prospects of many excellent local government officers and officials who have come to identify themselves closely with the district in which they work. For instance, it would not be possible to have three chief planning officers, or three chief executives. Men and women of great experience and dedication would be thrown on the scrap heap, at a time when we should not be adding to the sum total of human misery in that way.

For every possible reason, the direction in which Banham appears to be setting out is, I suggest, unacceptable to vast numbers of people throughout the country. I should like my right hon. Friend, if I may put it in this crude way, to pull the plug on Banham. If it is not possible to work towards the unitary district authorities that I want, for goodness' sake let us pull the plug on Banham. All the wasteful expenditure that Banham would involve would thereby be avoided. In addition, all the disappointment that would be felt throughout the country

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

would be avoided. Furthermore, we should avoid turning this place into a cockpit where local issues, deeply felt, were bitterly argued over, to little productive gain.

I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this unusual type of debate that we have several times a year. It is a valuable part of our parliamentary process. My right hon. Friend always has an extremely difficult task in summing up the speeches at the end of the debate, but I hope that he will at least be able to allude to what I have said and that he will pass on to his ministeral colleagues how deeply I feel on these matters.

4.16 pm

Mr. Nigel Jones (Cheltenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on what he has just said. He reflected many of my views on the local government commission, but he went a little further than I would when he said that the Leader of the House should suggest to the Prime Minister that he ought to pull the plug on Banham. Nevertheless, what he said about the additional load on individual councillors and the increased remoteness of local government after Banham are issues which ought to be taken on board. I hope that the Leader of the House will respond to them.

I rise for the first tiime in an Adjournment debate to raise two issues connected with our security services. As the Leader of the House knows, last Thursday during business questions I asked whether we could have a debate before the recess on our security services, in the wake of the wide allegations made recently about so-called bugging.

The first issue relates to the continuing spate of allegations in the media, linking our security services with the bugging of private individuals. The second issue, which it is about time the House addressed, is the continuing ban on membership of trade unions at Government communications headquarters in my constituency.

The time has come for a clear Government statement on our security services, including GCHQ. Many talented people who work in the security services feel aggrieved that they are not permitted to answer the allegations of bugging published in national newspapers. Last week's knee-jerk response by the Home Secretary was insufficient either to set the record straight or to give support to those in the security services.

I spoke at the weekend to many people who work at GCHQ, when Cheltenham had another of its famous marches. The town has become notorious for its marches in recent months. We had a march against the Government's proposals to close the coal mines. In January, we had our annual march against the continuing ban on trade union membership at GCHQ. There has also been a series of marches in Cheltenham, and elsewhere in the county of Gloucestershire, against the Government's proposals to cap the county council and force cuts in education, policing and other services.

Those who work at GCHQ feel that the Government are perhaps happy to let the bugging stories run in the media because they divert attention away from the Government's economic and policy difficulties. I do not intend to comment on that, but it is time that the Government made a statement to set the record straight. I cannot understand the Government's reluctance to allow a full and detailed debate to clear the air on the bugging allegations. The allegations go beyond the remit of GCHQ, and its workers want the record put straight because they do not do that kind of thing. It is up to the Government to decide whether they want an inquiry into where the bugging is happening, who is doing it and why it is being published in newspapers. I do not deny newspaper proprietors the right to sell their newspapers, but it must be wrong for those who cannot answer back to be implicated and besmirched in this way.

Workers at GCHQ expect answers from the Government because newspaper stories about leaks from the security services are harming the reputation of staff. The staff have had to suffer much at the hands of the Government and a debate would give the Government a chance to recognise their professionalism, skill and dedication.

In a debate in 1984, my predecessor, Sir Charles Irving, said:

> "I assure the House that it would be difficult to find a more noble, loyal, hardworking and sincere group than the 8,000 employees"

at

> "GCHQ. They seek only the opportunities to continue with their valuable services in peace and security."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1984; Vol. 55, c. 42-43.]

Apart from there now being far fewer than 8,000 employees at GCHQ, that statement remains true today.

A debate on GCHQ gives the House a chance to review and, I hope, condemn the ban on trade unions that the Government imposed almost 10 years ago. In January, I had the privilege to march with trade unionists through Cheltenham against the ban. The march has, unfortunately, been an annual feature of the Cheltenham social calendar since 1984 and it will continue to be so until GCHQ employees are given back the right to join a trade union.

I remind the House that 14 people were sacked for the sole reason that they refused to give up their union membership. They were not dangerous left wingers, communists or entryists but decent, hard-working Gloucestershire people. One of them, Clive Lloyd, has carried on the fight as a Liberal Democrat councillor in Cheltenham. The biggest threat to national security comes not from GCHQ trade unionists but from the incompetence, arrogance and stupidity of the Government, who have so damaged the reputation of this country.

As the so-called bugging scandals are now in the public domain, it is vital that the Government come clean. It is no good waiting for the publication of a Bill some time later this year, as the Leader of the House promised at business questions last Thursday. GCHQ staff deserve backing from the Government. They have been attacked by the Government through the union ban and they are being attacked in the national newspapers. Their professionalism is now being called into question by the press and the Government must come clean on the rumours.

4.23 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I make no apology for taking this opportunity before we break for the spring recess of raising matters about which my constituents feel quite strongly—not local issues that I have raised previously in such debates but national issues. It is the sense of lack of competence and of lack of sense of

direction at the heart of government, which I believe was the main cause of the losses in the county council elections recently. In Somerset, these were not local issues.

I mention elements of competence and lack of direction. Of course, there are qualifications to lack of direction. There is no point in having plenty of direction in government if one is going in the wrong direction and I praise the Government's capacity to listen, conciliate and, as we have seen in recent days, retreat where necessary. That is all right, but it would be better—I shall give some examples—if we did not get into such difficulties in the first place.

Underlying much of that malaise are aspects of legislation that this Parliament has inherited from the previous Parliament. Fairly innocuous pieces of legislation that went through the House without much party controversy, such as the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990, are now producing a horror of regulations that are affecting businesses, charities, village halls and individuals all over the country.

I know that Ministers are aware of these matters and are anxious to tackle them in the proposed legislation for the next Session, but the horror of damage being inflicted on businesses and individuals continues to cause great resentment and difficulty in rural and urban areas.

Before I give some of the other examples that have come to the fore in recent weeks, perhaps I ought to say that I greatly sympathise with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in coping with a press, especially a Conservative press, that I do not think any Conservative Prime Minister has had to cope with since the days of Stanley Baldwin, who had to cope with the Beaverbrook and Rothermere-owned press.

I cannot think of a time in my fairly lengthy experience in working for the Conservative party and being interested and active in politics when a Conservative Prime Minister has had to cope with such bitter opposition from the editors of *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, not only in their leader columns but in the articles that they commission for their newspapers. I think of the rather obsessed tirades from Lord Rees-Mogg and the contribution—not in one of those newspapers—a few days ago from Sir John Nott, a former Member of the House whose main achievement in recent years has been to earn a salary which would make the average chairman of a water or electricity company green with envy.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hope he realises that he is not succeeding in pulling the heart strings of Labour Members. It is quite clear that Conservative Members "don't like it up 'em" when they get it from the press. Is he aware that this is the sort of hostile press that not only a Labour Government but a Labour opposition has to put up with? Has he ever shown us any sympathy when we have been subjected to these regular tirades or does he expect us to show him sympathy?

Mr. Nicholson: I have always admired and enjoyed the sense of humour of the hon. Gentleman, but I am certainly not looking to him for sympathy and I do not expect my party to look to the Labour party for sympathy. *[Interruption.]* I am making a statement of fact about what we have experienced in recent weeks and it has not helped my right hon. and hon. Friends in administering some considerably difficult issues.

At the heart of the discontent of those four editors, with very different backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, prejudices and ability to be conciliated, has been the Bill to implement the Maastricht treaty which I hope we will give a Third Reading in the House on Thursday.

There is considerable resentment among Conservative Members at the hysterical opposition to the Bill, not only in the House but outside in the press, which has had a considerable effect on people in our constituencies and was certainly one factor in the recent elections.

Once the Bill is through Parliament, we will have more, better and more easily available information about the treaty. I appreciate the conventions that have hitherto prevented us from allowing that information to go to every household. I also think that my right hon. Friends should not take the consistent voting of hon. Members for that Bill and treaty to imply agreement or assent to the rather rhetorical and exaggerated expectations about European union that exist in certain European countries. I have no time for the concept of a European union. *[Interruption.]* A European commonwealth—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I remind the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) and all others present that repetitive seated interventions are not part of the traditions of the House.

Mr. Nicholson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The term "commonwealth" is, I believe, understood in this country. I believe that the concept of European commonwealth would be supported by most strands of opinion on these matters. A union implies something that many Conservative Members—who have consistently supported the Bill as a means of ratifying a treaty that reconciles conflicting elements—could not accept. Navigating that treaty and the Bill through Parliament has been difficult for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues, and that task has not been helped by the attitudes adopted by parts of the press.

One of the prime issues that has caused considerable discontent in recent weeks, especially among elderly people, is the imposition of VAT on fuel. Many of us accept that we need that measure for revenue and environmental reasons, but we also need—and I impress this upon my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who was a skilled and able Secretary of State for Social Security—to protect those elderly people who do not necessarily qualify for income support. That VAT imposition has caused great fear among people who depend on satisfactory heating and they will need to be reassured, and reassured speedily.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the only conceivable way in which the ambition that he has identified could even be approached is if there were an increase in the old-age pension which entirely compensated all old-age pensioners for the VAT increase, which will be approximately £1 per week in the first year and £2 per week in the second year? As my right hon. Friends have ruled that out, and are only prepared to operate through the social security system, is it not clear that the only conceivable way in which the objective set out

[Mr. William Powell]

by my hon. Friend can be met is for the Government to withdraw the VAT proposal and introduce other means of raising the revenue?

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend was in a minority when he dissented from that measure, and I shall leave him to make his own speech. He and other hon. Members are as concerned as I am, however, to protect the elderly who are above the poverty level. We must try to find some means of doing that.

Another issue of equal concern to elderly people that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) is the threat to sub-post offices as a result of possible measures for which the Department of Social Security may be responsible. I regret that so many people have been scared into believing that they will lose the ability to have their pensions paid into post offices. Whether that scare has arisen through the incompetence of the Department of Social Security or the malignity of a certain union within the post office, I know not. I impress upon my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that I hope that tomorrow's debate on the sub-post offices and the speech from the Secretary of State for Social Security will lay those fears to rest. That is vital because this matter is causing very great concern. Those fears should be met.

I mentioned that there are concerns about the way that legislation—sometimes some years after it has passed through the House—impacts on people, businesses, charities and others. I recall that at the start of each day's proceedings we have a phrase that we should be "godly and quietly governed". I cannot speak for the first of those epithets, but there is great pressure from constituencies that we should be quietly governed, that there should be less interference and tinkering with institutions and systems that, on the whole, work well. I hope that my hon. Friends agree that the malaise shown in the recent county elections makes any proposal to privatise the Post Office in this Parliament a dead duck.

We also have anxiety about the railways, and next week we shall have an opportunity to debate the remaining stages of the Railways Bill. There is concern lest we shall not be able to sustain in this country a railway system that serves passengers, maintains decent fares, transfers freight to the railways from the roads and takes advantage of the benefits that will come from the opening of the channel tunnel. I speak of the cause for which our late hon. Friend Robert Adley spent much of his life. He worked hard and with great expertise for that cause. We shall have his example and work before us when we debate and vote on the subject next week.

In a point of order after Question Time today, the hon. Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Tyler) spoke of IACS, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's new system for administering subsidy from Europe. I regret that the hon. Gentleman is not in his place to pursue the matter because in recent weeks farmers in my constituency, and particularly on Exmoor, encountered considerable difficulty and conflicting advice. The Minister issued advice that did not appear to percolate through to local and regional offices of the Ministry.

The new system may look all right on paper to Ministers and civil servants in Whitehall, but it does not seem to have been prepared and co-ordinated sufficiently well to enable those involved to cope with it within the short time available. The forms had to be in by 15 May. Farmers are not bureaucrats. They are not skilled in filling in vast numbers of forms. They feel resentful about what happened. I hope that we learn from our mistakes, some of which can cause immense concern.

There has been a tremendous welling of concern in recent times about law and order and an awareness, particularly among magistrates and police who must administer the system, that the Criminal Justice Act 1991 has not been working as it was intended. I pay great tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary for listening to those calls. He has received advice which has enabled him to act in this legislative Session to deal with some of the worst problems that have arisen.

While I pay tribute to the Home Secretary for that, it is a shame that we did not have that move a few weeks earlier, when it might have been of help to our people as they went into the county elections. After all, counties control police authorities and are deeply concerned with the whole issue of law and order. Our people felt, as they went into those elections, that they were fighting with one hand tied behind their backs, bearing in mind the considerable problems that were being faced over law and order matters.

On a similar matter, the Secretary of State for Education issued a statement on tests which, though welcome, was only half a loaf or a curate's egg. He has accepted the representations that he received from an enormous number of reasonable people. I refer not to militants and protesters but to Conservative teachers, governors and parents. They all said that the tests were far too complex and bureaucratic. He has accepted that view for next year, but I am baffled as to why he cannot accept it for this year.

I hope that my right hon. Friend, whom I admire and wish success in the difficult task in hand, will forgive me—he is more learned than I—if I wonder whether he had in mind a few lines from "Macbeth" as he decided not to withdraw the tests for this year. The language is lurid, but "Macbeth" is a lurid play. The lines that my right hon. Friend may have had in mind are spoken by Macbeth:

> "I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will learn from the considerable experience that we, the Back Benchers, have had in recent months in respect of those tests and listen to what we and others in the education system tell him.

I am sorry for raising so many matters. However, the problems that we have faced in our constituencies and in the recent contests are not simply recession-related or related to the Maastricht debate. They are related to a range of matters, many of which from legislation that the House has passed and from the interpretation placed on that legislation. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is responsible for the Government's legislative programme and I hope that he will consider the prayer that we shall indeed be godly, but also more quietly, governed in future.

4.39 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The speech of the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) was extraordinary. Opposition Members listened to him

attentively. However, it is not blood that the Government are steeped in—it is deep doo-doo, and the Secretary of State for Education typifies that most.

The hon. Member for Taunton began by complaining about the treatment that the Government are receiving from Tory newspapers. He then listed a series of very good reasons why those newspapers should be attacking a Conservative Government. He mentioned VAT on heating and lighting, pensioners being paid through bank accounts, privatisation of the Post Office and of the railways and testing in schools. Those things have been inflicted on the country not by newspaper editors, but the Government.

It was amazing that the hon. Member for Taunton could attack his Government. I would like to know how many of those issues he supported in the Lobby. He should be more careful in the future before voting for policies of that kind which, quite frankly, fully justify the attacks that the newspapers are now mounting on this incompetent Conservative Government. Indeed, the Goverment are beginning to resemble "Eldorado"—rotten actors, lousy scripts and no popularity. Let us hope that the Government quickly go the way that "Eldorado" is shortly to go.

I had not intended to say all that, but I was carried away by the cri de cour of the hon. Member for Taunton as a Conservative Member suffering so badly under the incompetence of his party's Government. The hon. Gentleman now knows how the rest of us feel.

I want to refer to a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)—the problems of prostitution in the area that she represents. Similar problems are experienced in other residential areas of London. My point is related to what my hon. Friend said. I want to consider the supply and use of illegal substances which, in future, I will refer to as drugs. Although nicotine and alcohol are very potent drugs, when we use the term "drugs" we more or less know that we mean the use of illegal substances.

The criminal activity surrounding the supply and use of drugs is closely linked to prostitution. It tends to be conducted in the same areas of London. King's Cross is perhaps the most notorious area for both in the capital city at the moment although there are few other parts of London not affected in some way by both problems.

The first thing that we must accept is that those problems will not go away. We cannot police prostitution off the streets and, likewise, we shall not police the use of drugs off the streets. That is impossible. I do not say that as some kind of child of the sixties. I have never had an inclination to use drugs, I have never used them, and unless a very tempting offer comes along, I have no intention of doing so in future. However, I will not necessarily criticise those who have.

When I heard Commander John Grieve of New Scotland yard speaking to the Association of Chief Police Officers recently, I realised that he was saying something which many people who are given the impossible task of trying to deal with prostitution and drugs supply are saying to us as Members of Parliament involved in legislation. He was saying, "What are we going to do about this? These matters cannot simply be policed off the streets."

Commander Grieve said that we should consider whether it was time to consider a form of limited licensing for the suppliers and users of drugs. He did not say that we should legalise. He said, "Let us just look at that," but he was immediately denounced by large numbers of so-called opinion formers in this House and elsewhere.

What Commander Grieve was saying as a senior Metropolitan police officer is something that many senior police officers are saying in London and elsewhere in the country. We must listen to what people like Commander Grieve are saying and look at the matter impartially, without the knee-jerk political reaction that tends to follow such statements.

Shortly after Commander Grieve's statement, the Prime Minister was asked what he thought about it. He said, "No, we will have nothing to do with this. It is a matter of controlling demand and that is what we are going to do." That was rather hypocritical as the Government are cutting the budgets for drug education in schools. They are also cutting the money that drug rehabilitation centres receive from central Government. It is a bit much to start talking about reducing demand by increasing education when the amount of money dedicated to education and rehabilitation programmes is being reduced.

Ms Abbott: Does my hon. Friend agree that the drugs trade, like prostitution, is a private vice with public ramifications? One of the public by-products of the burgeoning drugs trade in London is the number of shootings connected with the drugs trade. There has been a very steep rise in the number of shootings in public places and clubs in London in the past 18 months and they are almost entirely connected with the drugs trade, particularly crack cocaine.

Mr. Banks: I accept that and I want to refer to it in my short contribution. The criminal activity surrounding the supply of illegal substances causes us the greatest concern.

As I have said, I am not here to advocate the legalisation of certain drugs, but I advocate that we should at least be prepared to consider that without bolting for cover because we feel that the subject is too delicate and controversial to raise in this House. As soon as we reach the point when we cannot raise such issues in the House of Commons, we are in real trouble in terms of reaching considered opinions within our democratic processes.

I am most concerned about cannabis, which is the substance which is most usually used. I have never used it, but I am informed that cannabis is non-addictive. It has a tendency to calm users—in contrast with alcohol which, when taken to excess, leads to very aggressive behaviour. Much of the recent rural violence has been associated with over-consumption of alcohol.

If we consider the matter from a health point of view, we should consider legalising cannabis and declaring alcohol and nicotine illegal. Alcohol is involved in many health problems and in violence. As for nicotine, 110,000 people per year die from smoking-related diseases. I have heard of no one who has died from a disease related to the use of cannabis.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Some years ago, I introduced a ten-minute Bill on compulsory drug testing in schools. While my hon. Friend is concerned about cannabis, I was concerned about crack from America. Crack is killing people, particularly schoolchildren. Will my hon. Friend consider that?

Mr. Banks: Yes, I tend to agree with my hon. Friend about the problems which are moving from the United States to this country, particularly in relation to crack. I remember raising the issue with the then Home Secretary —the present Foreign Secretary—when he had not even heard of the substance.

We have not taken the problem seriously on this side of the Atlantic until fairly recently. One could almost argue that the American market has reached saturation point and suppliers are looking to the European market, particularly the market here, to continue their trade. We must control the dealers who are responsible for the criminal violence associated with supply. Where there is a demand, there will always be someone prepared to supply.

One of the other arguments that we should examine with regard to possible legislation is that if we legalised certain drugs we would be in a better position to control the supply. It is true that some people who start on soft drugs end up as hopeless addicts taking the hardest drugs. Equally, it can be argued that someone who starts with a small dry sherry may end up as a hopeless alcoholic drinking methylated spirits. Although that happens in some cases, mostly it does not, so we should not be too frightened by that argument.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington and for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) referred to the violence surrounding the supply of drugs. That concerns us in parts of the capital city. There is a demand, so there will be a supply. While the demand is for an illegal substance, control over supply is something that we can only look to the police to deal with, so we are back where we started. The police are already saying that they cannot deal with the problem; they do not have the resources and, indeed, they will never have sufficient resources to deal with it.

To sum up, the Government should be prepared to examine carefully the case for legalising certain categories of drugs, take the best evidence and allow us to consider the matter quietly. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House want to deal with the violence associated with drug supply and the health problems associated with drug use, and I am sure that we can take out all party political dogma from the subject and look at it as people who, in the end, are responsible for the legislation that is passed through the Houses of Parliament. If we were examining the case for legislation, we could be talking about eliminating the violence surrounding the supply.

Legalisation could ensure the quality of the supply. A number of deaths have been reported recently in the King's Cross area. It is suspected that they were all drug users taking contaminated drugs. Because drug taking is illegal, people cannot go to the police and complain that what they bought in good faith turned out to be baking powder or something worse. That is precisely what is happening in the supply and demand area at present.

Legalisation could lead to greater regulation and control. It would also give us a greater opportunity to educate our young people about the use of drugs and other illegal substances. I simply suggest that perhaps the Government should consider setting up a royal commission to examine the whole subject. It could be looked at dispassionately, away from the knee-jerk political reactions which unfortunately followed the sensible and reasonable statement by Commander Grieve at the ACPO conference recently.

4.52 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) does a great service to the House by raising the question of the impact of drugs on our culture and society today, just as the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) did in her remarks about prostitution. I strongly support the wise words that have been uttered today and on previous occasions by my namesake the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

Frankly, the most alarming aspect of the drugs problem is the way in which it is reaching more of our youngsters in schools and elsewhere. There is not the slightest doubt, as the chief constable of West Yorkshire said only last week, that so much of the explosion of crime among youngsters at present appears to be drug-related. Certainly, that is confirmed to me by police officers to whom I have talked. The fact of the matter is that we are losing the war against drugs. We must do much more to ensure that more people, especially young people, are not destroyed by these wicked instruments.

Adjournment debates such as this always raise a wide variety of matters—they are among some of the most interesting debates held in the House. At present, my postbag is swollen by two specific issues. One is the question of the threat to sub-post offices. I entirely support what has been said by my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson).

Frankly, it is incredible that the Government have got themselves into this absurd position. The heads of those who were responsible for drafting the extremely maladroit letters—to put the matter mildly—should be presented on a plate. It is one of the most serious political misjudgments, and a matter that my right hon. Friends must do much more to correct at once. These things did not happen when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was responsible for the Department which seems to be at fault in this case.

I was amused by what my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South said about local government reorganisation in Staffordshire. Northamptonshire county council is unloved. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who used to be a member of that county council, knows that it was unloved even when he served on it.

My constituents, whether they live in east Northamptonshire or Corby, are anxious to have a unitary authority that is close to the grass roots—much closer to them than the Northamptonshire county council. If the Local Government Commission proposes what it appears to have proposed in Derbyshire, I am afraid that this will all come to grief. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South was entirely right to raise the matter.

I have a great deal of sympathy with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton said. I merely say to him that the other matter that is swelling my postbag at present relates to the issue of value added tax on fuel. I have thought hard about this matter. I simply have to say that it has been a colossal misjudgment by the Government. It would be greatly to the credit of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House if they withdrew the VAT proposal and came forward, even at this late stage, with alternative revenue-raising proposals.

This matter has caused immense resentment in the country. The number of letters that I have received from my constituents—and, indeed, the constituents of all hon. and right hon. Members—far exceeds anything with regard to the business about the mines last autumn. I have no doubt that this matter will continue to run. The only satisfactory way of dealing with it is to withdraw the proposal and come forward with another proposal before the Third Reading and Royal Assent.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's arguments. Does he extend the argument to value added tax on telephone bills, fridges, cookers and other items which pensioners and many other people in our society need to survive and make a decent life for themselves? Surely the whole thrust of the Government's argument is that VAT is a good tax and income tax is a bad tax. Labour Members take the absolutely opposite view.

Mr. Powell: That is not the thrust of the Government's policy at all. I stand by the settlement that was made 20 years ago. Deliberately, the Government and my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath)—this has since been reaffirmed by all Prime Ministers—decided that those items that impact most on the budgets of the poorer people in our society should be exempt from VAT. Obviously, fuel and power are absolutely essential. I have always made it perfectly clear to my constituents that I would not in any way support the extension of VAT, and I was delighted to vote with the Labour party last week when the matter came forward.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Did my hon. Friend note that the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), like those on his Front Bench, gave no commitment whatever to reverse this measure?

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend makes his point, and I shall make mine. Undoubtedly people will take note of exactly what has been said.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House would be extremely surprised if I did not use this opportunity to say a little more about war crimes in Bosnia. It is not the first time—nor, indeed, will it be the last time—that I shall raise the matter. With each of these Adjournment debates, there has been further encouraging progress towards the establishment of an ad hoc tribunal to deal with the outrageous criminal activities that have been taking place —I stress, on all sides—throughout Yugoslavia.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, under his mandate in resolution 808, reported to the Security Council with a draft constitution for such an ad hoc tribunal on 3 May. That was extremely welcome, not least because he had obviously consulted widely among the members of the Security Council and the member states of the United Nations. So he was able to produce, not a document containing a series of options, as some of us had feared, which could be used as an excuse for further delay in the establishment of such a tribunal, but a specific and detailed constitution which could certainly form the basis for discussion and, I hope, an early resolution and decision of the Security Council.

I hope that the British Government will give enthusiastic suport to the work which has been done by the Secretary-General's office. I hope that the Government will take the lead in ensuring that the ad hoc tribunal is established as quickly as possible.

We all know that serious breaches of international law have occurred in Yugoslavia for some time. Those breaches include breaches of the Geneva conventions of 12 August 1949 for the protection of victims of war; breaches of the Hague convention with respect to the laws and customs of war on land and the regulations annexed thereto on 18 October 1907; breaches of the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide of 9 December 1948; and breaches of the charter of the international military tribunal of 8 August 1945. Each of those six important aspects of international criminal law has been infringed again and again. The Secretary-General made that plain in his report under resolution 808.

It is not sufficient merely to establish the ad hoc tribunal. We have made a great deal of progress on that, and I am glad to say that the British Government have given much support to the process. However, it is necessary for us to ensure that, having established such a tribunal—when the United Nations Security Council makes that final move—it can operate successfully and earn the respect of the international community for the manner in which it fulfils the responsibilities entrusted to it by the international community under the authority of the Security Council.

I stress to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House the point that I made the last time that I raised the matter with him. Preliminary action needs to be taken in establishing the special prosecutor's office. We must ensure that the necessary resources are available to the special prosecutor by way of police and legal assistance. The special prosecutor must have an adequate budget agreed by the members of the United Nations and approved by the Secretary-General. The office must have the physical facilities for the special prosecutor to carry out the work. It must be possible to interview witnesses, many of whom are today refugees from the terrible conflict found in southern Austria, southern Hungary and Slovenia.

The equivalent of a magistrate's jurisdiction must be established, so that charges can be properly laid against those whom it is alleged have committed war crimes. I identify three categories of person whom the special prosecutor must investigate. The first are the policy and decision-makers—the senior Government officials and senior military commanders. The second are field commanders, both military and civilian, who commanded the forces which carried out the violations, or persons who could have prevented violations from being committed by forces under their command. The third are the individual perpetrators who carried out acts of murder, torture, rape and other crimes. All those people should be investigated.

The world must respect warrants issued by that first chamber—we may call it a magistrates court or an indicting chamber. We must make it clear that, if any person who is the subject of such a warrant travels outside Yugoslavia, the world community will be prepared to arrest them and hand them over to the ad hoc tribunal for trial.

Then we must ensure that the trial takes place. It will be a lengthy process. It will not be possible to try huge numbers of people, but it will certainly be possible to try some. I stress to my right hon. Friend that the reason why all this matters is that, in the horror of what is taking place in Yugoslavia, the world community must stand up and identify what is right and what is wrong in terms of behaviour towards other human beings.

[Mr. Powell]

When there is murder, rape and torture, we must stand and say, "This is wrong." We may not be able to put it right this afternoon or this evening, but we shall certainly do all that we possibly can to ensure that those who are responsible are brought to an acceptable form of justice —if not this month, next month, next year or whenever.

One of the most effective ways in which we can bring the behaviour in Yugoslavia to a halt is to serve notice that it will not be tolerated by an international community, and that the international community will establish the necessary mechanisms to bring to justice those who are responsible.

I have raised the subject of war crimes again and again with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, as he well knows. From time to time, he has been kind enough to pass on my remarks to my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister. I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend because the last time that I raised the matter, I mentioned a letter that I had written to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and I swiftly received a most encouraging and effective response from the Prime Minister.

I want my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to urge our right hon. Friends to take the lead on behalf of Great Britain and ensure that what is established is an effective voice for the world community but also a practical voice in bringing about what the world community most earnestly wishes to ensure—that those who are wrongdoers and those who have committed the most wicked crimes are brought to justice in this world, as in the next.

5.6 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I wish to speak on three matters. I shall not reiterate what the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) said about pensions and benefits being paid in post offices. I hope that the Leader of the House took into consideration what he said. Fears have been expressed by many pensioners throughout the country, and especially by the 250 members of the Pencoed old-age pensioners association, who sent me a petition and a letter today expressing their fears.

Hundreds in my constituency have written pleading that the Government should reassess the position. I know that two or three other hon. Members have already referred to the matter, but I must emphasise it on behalf of my constituents. I hope that the Leader of the House will take the message back to the appropriate Minister so that action can be taken.

The second matter that I wish to raise is escalating crime. The *Glamorgan Gazette* published in my constituency last weekend contained yet again a front-page article referring to the escalation of crime in my constituency. Most alarmingly, it said that in the Ogmore valley—an area that was built around the collieries—most shops in small villages were burgled or had their windows smashed, not once or twice in two or three years, but every other week.

Years ago in districts such as Ogmore, the majority of children cut their teeth on a lump of coal and miners were almost the only breadwinners in the valley. They were responsible for their actions and those of their children, and were respected in the community. That community was no different from the one in which I was brought up in the Rhondda.

Where I lived, the front door was always open and the door into the passage was always closed to stop the draught. The only thing that we stopped from outside was the draught; we never stopped our neighbours coming in. Now, in an area that is no different from Ogmore which I represent, residents normally have to unbolt a number of doors before friends and neighbours can come in. That happens not only in Ogmore in my valley, but elsewhere.

Over the past 14 years, crime in our society has escalated, not only among young people but among middle-aged people, because so many people without work are looking for money in communities that have traditionally had a great respect for the elderly and neighbours. My home is no more than five minutes' walk from Bridgend central police authority, which trains police for Mid Glamorgan and most of south Wales.

Crime has escalated in the valleys, in areas that are only 13 miles from that police centre. Crime has escalated elsewhere; on a Saturday night, the centre of Bridgend has become a no-go area for the residents and those who visit the cafeterias after 10 pm. It is high time that the Government took more drastic action to try to remedy the escalation in crime.

Cannot more funding be made available to enable police to go back on the beat, so that we have more police on the streets and fewer in cars? My constituency has a typically close community of friendly, caring people, where families and friends nurture the community spirit. That spirit is being lost in our villages and towns, and there is no control over the escalation of crime.

My agent, Councillor Mrs. Muriel Williams, lives in Nantymoel. She has been a magistrate for 30 years—she knows that crime is escalating in her town, as she can see the evidence from the front window of her home on the main road, and as a magistrate. Only 20 yards from her home is a closed police station, which used to serve the top of the valley but is now to be converted into a home.

Why is it necessary for police stations to close throughout our valley communities? Why cannot we have the same policing levels that we had years ago, so that we could frighten criminals and help curb the escalation of crime? I am sure that, if the Government put their mind to it, they could achieve that goal and stop the elderly from being frightened. It is a crying shame that, when people reach the age of 65 or 70, they are afraid to go out of their homes, which they have to lock and secure. In the community that I represent, people are afraid to open the door and face escalating crime.

Another issue close to my heart and, I am sure, to that of the Leader of the House, is Sunday trading. After last Friday, a number of people are probably sick and tired of hearing about Sunday trading, but it is important to raise the subject, as it is a matter of grave concern. The Leader of the House has often told me frankly that it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that the law according to the Shops Act 1950 is upheld.

Last Friday, the Minister promised that the subject would be considered in the autumn, and that we could probably expect legislation next year or perhaps the year after. Meanwhile, lawbreakers, whoever they are—greedy grocers, or people who support the Conservative party through various funding arrangements—can continue. It is high time that the Government acted to ensure that such

people are taken to court. The Government should enforce the Shops Act. It is no good placing the responsibility on local authorities, which have few funds to finance the numerous prosecutions that should take place.

I am sure that the Leader of the House wants to ensure that law and order are upheld in this country. I mentioned the crime wave in my constituency, and the position is the same throughout the country. Some people may ask, if B and Q can commit a crime and get away with millions of pounds, why should not a burglar smash a window in the street in Nantymoel and take away a video? The law should be upheld for the big companies that break the law and pocket millions of pounds, which probably come from the profits of small shopkeepers who are forced to close their businesses. Some of them have been forced out of business by crimes committed by the big retailers which open on Sundays and take most of their trade.

I could continue at length, Madam Deputy Speaker. You were in the Chair last Friday—you kept awake most of the time and maintained much interest in the issue. You mastered the complex subject of voting at the end of the debate admirably. It took some of us the whole week to understand what the procedure would be, and I was grateful for your ruling last Friday.

I spent 12 months preparing a complicated Bill on Sunday trading and presented it in the hope of establishing which of the three options hon. Members wanted—total deregulation as proposed by the Government, partial deregulation as proposed by the Shopping Hours Reform Council or the proposals in my Bill.

The vote was taken and the result was 127 to 13—a majority of 114 hon. Members in the House on a Friday in support of my Shops (Amendment) Bill. When the Report stage was completed at 29 minutes past 2, a motion was made to the effect that the Third Reading should be agreed to on the basis of the vote that had taken place only minutes before. However, that was rejected, so the Bill is still in limbo.

We are discussing whether we should adjourn for the Whitsun recess on Thursday 27 May. It is not possible for the Leader of the House, bearing in mind his responsibility for arranging, not only the spring Adjournment, but also the business of the House, to ensure that Thursday 27 May is not a holiday, but the day on which the House can perhaps resolve this issue? Cannot the full debate be held on 27 May, so that we can look at the Report stage of the Bill that I presented on Friday, consideration of which was adjourned? We could then resolve some of the issues involved well before Christmas, and avoid yet another escalation of illegal Sunday Christmas trading.

I have before me a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley), whose Bill was treated in a similar fashion by the Government. I also have protests from my hon. Friends the Members for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), whose Bills were treated similarly.

The Bill concerning disabled people presented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris)—to which I referred in a point of order to you, Madam Deputy Speaker—has not yet been debated. The care given to the matter by my right hon. Friend and by numerous other hon. Members should have been recognised by the Leader of the House and the Government. Time should be made available for that Bill to be discussed, as it should for my Bill.

It is noticeable that the Government select Bills that they want private Members to put to the House on a Friday. They will pass those Bills if they want legislation introduced by private Members, and they will give them their blessing so that they are introduced.

You said, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we should go to the Procedure Committee today to get a different system organised. The Chair should, and does, protect the interests of private Members, and protection of this interest is long overdue. Everything is done by ballot. If one is lucky on the day of the draw and is first, second or third, one gets the opportunity to introduce a Bill.

When my Bill was drawn out after the last election, I thought that at last my luck had changed—not on Littlewoods pools; I do not want a cheque from them—but because I had drawn No. 3 in the ballot, out of 20, to introduce a private Member's Bill. I was also to be given the princely sum of £200 to assist me in obtaining legal advice to promote the Bill. I thought that it was wonderful.

Twelve months later, I found that the Government were not prepared to listen to reasoned argument. An early-day motion in my name, signed by 258 right hon. and hon. Members, asked the House to pass my Bill last Friday. Despite that, the Government rejected the idea and suggested that we should have legislation in some months' time—perhaps 12 months' or two years' time. It is high time that the Government gave the matter further consideration.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): My hon. Friend is making an important speech. He referred to my Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. As he said, the provisions and purposes of that Bill have been discussed on the Floor of the House for seven hours without a vote. The Bill was blocked in the first place by an hon. Member, who lost his seat at the last election, who said that he would not talk it out, and who then proceeded to do so. He made a personal statement of apology to the Speaker and to the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend may wish to know that many right hon. and hon. Members opposite support my Bill; they are among its sponsors; and they are saying that the Bill has been treated "discreditably" in the proceedings that we have had so far.

I back the appeal that my hon. Friend is making to the Leader of the House. This is a House of Commons matter par excellence. I do hope that the right hon. Gentleman will look very carefully at what my hon. Friend has said and is saying, and reassure those who think that there is a pattern to the tactics in obstructing Bills that the Government do not want to see enacted.

Mr. Powell: I am very grateful for the comments of my right hon. Friend.

I will conclude now, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that a number of other hon. Members are waiting to be called in the debate.

An article in *The Guardian* on 10 May is headed:

"Major plans fast law on Sunday trading".

There is an opportunity here to have a fast law on Sunday trading. I tried everything. I asked who wanted to serve on the Committee. I made alterations between Second Reading and Report stage, when we conceded four major issues. The DIY stores, garden centres, extension of the size of the shop—all were agreed in Committee, together with 28 other liberalisation actions on Sunday trading. I

[Mr. Powell]

thought that would induce the Government to say that that was sufficient and to take the Bill on board, so that we could have a decent law on Sunday trading.

It is high time that the Government took action, and that they remembered that private Members' Bills and activities within the House should be honoured by the Executive.

5.27 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I do not believe that we should adjourn for the spring recess without considering the impact of the proposed high-speed rail link across the borough of Gravesham. The House will recall that we are now in a six months' consultation period and that the clock has been ticking since April. There are certain points that I wish to bring to the attention of the House.

The high-speed rail link runs alongside the A2 and therefore past the homes of some 5,000 householders in my constituency. It is proposed to tunnel beneath Pepper Hill, to what effect on the residents we just do not know. That is why I called in March for a geological survey to assess noise and vibration, if any, and the prospects of damage during the construction period to the properties situated above.

I have been glad to note the appointment of two consultancies: Sir William Halcrow and Partners and Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick and Partners, both of which have geophysical experts on their professional teams. I hope that they will get on with the job, that they will do their soil and chalk testing and that they will carry out an investigation of the presence or otherwise of dene-holes beneath the houses in the area.

But they must make haste. Local people, with the technical support of Gravesham borough council, need to see the results of the survey as soon as possible, because it is only with the survey that they can compare the tunnel route—with the advantages that it brings of low-level running in cuttings alongside the A2—with the alternative route, which involves a wide curve around Pepper Hill through open countryside. The plans for this route have been done only in outline, but they show the route to be at a considerable elevation, which would be detrimental both to Northfleet and to Istead Rise, the nearby village to the south. We certainly need precise details on the alternative route that may be proposed.

I hope that my right hon. Friends will encourage Union Railways to hasten its assessment of putting passing loops into the Ebbsfleet valley. That would allow a realignment at the A227 Wrotham road crossing, which could be at a far lower level and might even pass beneath the carriageway of the road. We also need a careful assessment of the environmental impact on the historic parish of Cobham. I wonder why such wide cuttings are necessary in the plans, and why they cannot be narrow, walled cuttings.

During the period of consultation, I hope that much other work will be done, not least to give careful consideration to the matter of compensation. Homes at Scalers Hill and Henhurst would be severely blighted if the railway were constructed, and the hundreds of residents of Pepper Hill are in jeopardy until the certainty of the plans is established.

My constituency is adversely affected by the high-speed rail link. It relies on the Government to ensure adequate environmental protection and compensation. People in Kent are not just apprehensive; they are also looking for opportunities that the railway might bring for jobs and new industries. That is why I wish Blue Circle Industries godspeed with its Kent Thameside project to tie in its landholdings with a potential international station. It has the strong support of Gravesham and Dartford borough councils, and its plans complement the exciting proposals that the Government introduced for the east Thames corridor.

Hon. Members will understand that we of north-west Kent are all under great pressure and are vulnerable to potentially great changes. It will be reassuring for local people to know that the House and the Government understand their anxieties and are sympathetic to their proposals.

My hon. Friends the Members for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) and for Corby (Mr. Powell) have clearly articulated the fears of their constituents, of mine and of most hon. Members about the scares surrounding the sub-post offices. Those fears, principally the fears of the sub-postmasters, have put the issue on the public agenda, and it should be looked at fair and square in an attempt, not to scare the most vulnerable people—pensioners and other beneficiaries of social security—but to understand the two distinct elements of the problem.

First, there are problems for the Department of Social Security which pays the benefits. Then there is the future of Post Office Counters and of sub-post offices throughout the country. We need to understand these two different, but intertwined, aspects to learn how to safeguard the future.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is not just a question of wanting to cherish the post offices and sub-post offices in our constituencies —that it is also a pragmatic question of paying out benefits and pensions? Thirty-five per cent. of those who receive benefits do not have bank or building society accounts, so they rely on post offices to distribute the money. We will therefore seek to defend and protect those post offices whenever we can.

Mr. Arnold: I know that my hon. Friend and many other colleagues do their utmost to defend our sub-post offices. His point is extremely valid.

Let us look first at the problem for the Department of Social Security. It spends £200 million paying out benefits, almost all of them across post office counters. That pays for the administration of more than 1 billion pieces of paper a year. That is phenomenally expensive, and it is worth reflecting that the £200 million would be immensely valuable if most of it could be paid directly to the beneficiaries.

Given my previous employment in the travellers cheque industry I can understand that a system involving 1 billion vouchers is wide open to fraud, which is not only a waste of taxpayers' money but consumes vast amounts of money that could be used in other ways. What on earth is the Department to do about the problem of costs and of fraud? It is looking at a system that has already been partly introduced on a voluntary basis: automated credit transfer

to the bank or building society accounts of beneficiaries. To do that effectively, the Department has to find out what beneficiaries will and will not accept.

Much of the problem has arisen in recent weeks because of market testing. A number of new pensioners were offered several options for payment. A small number of them were not given the written option of having the money paid by order book through Post Office Counters. The market testing was carried out to determine the reaction of the beneficiaries. We all know what that reaction was—there has been an extraordinary row, clearly expressing the wish of beneficiaries to have the option of receiving their benefits through vouchers payable at sub-post offices.

It was perfectly proper for the Department to carry out the market testing, and no doubt Ministers will learn the lessons from it, as was intended in the first place. We cannot get away from the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink)—that about 35 per cent. of pensioners and social security beneficiaries do not have bank or building society accounts. They have no means of receiving benefit besides receiving it in cash across the counter at sub-post offices.

The lesson to be learned from this episode is that beneficiaries must continue to be given the choice of how to be paid. I have no doubt that, due to increasing familiarity with bank and building society accounts, there will be a steady swing towards credit transfer and away from the payment by voucher. By common agreement in the House—particularly among Conservative Members, who represent most of the rural and suburban areas of the country—we understand the need for post office counters, both Crown and sub. The House should think about how to find a secure and valuable future for a terrific asset—the sub-post offices of this country.

It is inevitable that the number of vouchers will decrease as pensioners increasingly opt for automatic transfer of benefits to their bank or building society accounts. It will be a gradual change, but it will happen. As I said, I used to work in the travellers cheques industry and I was worried about my future because I thought that the travellers cheque—a paper voucher—was illogical and bound to be phased out. However, the current worldwide travellers cheque market is worth more than $40 billion. It may be illogical, but people want travellers cheques.

The same applies to pensions and social security benefits. Vouchers may be illogical in these days of electronic banking, but people want the security of their order books and vouchers that they can cash. However, post offices should be under no illusion—it is a wasting asset. We should be looking for new sources of business that would give the sub-post offices a viable future. The clearing banks are reducing their enormous branch networks, so that might be one opportunity. In my constituency, Barclays bank has closed its smaller branches at Northfleet and Meopham. That is being repeated throughout the country. Therefore, there is an opportunity for sub-post offices to go into encashment and across-the-counter services for our financial institutions.

I direct the attention of the House to a particularly interesting phenomenon—telephone banking. It is best exemplified by First Direct, a subsidiary of Midland Bank. Although it operates a telephone banking service, it still needs counters. That would be an obvious area of opportunity for sub-post offices. It would provide the counter service to complement the electronic banking service available over the telephone and through computer links.

5.42 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): Perhaps the first thing that the Leader of the House might consider is introducing a Bill to limit the length of time that hon. Members can speak in debates such as this. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) should not be able to drift in and out of the Chamber as and when it suits him and then take up the time of the House with a long speech.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Etherington: No, the hon. Gentleman has had long enough.

Mr. Arnold: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman's remarks are a slur. You can testify that I have been here throughout the debate.

Mr. Etherington: I shall not take back what I said about the length of time the hon. Gentleman spoke. I shall try to be brief, although I want to cover a number of issues.

Five hon. Members have already referred to the imposition of value added tax on fuel. I want to talk not about the effect of that on pensioners and other poor people, but about the effect that it will have on charities. They have already received one body blow because of the effect that the Finance Bill will have on their investments. In recent years, the Government have made charities an important aspect of society by hiving off many activities to them. If some of the charities go under, it would be the last fragmentation of society as we know it, especially for the old. As more than half the charities deal with old people, they will lose out through VAT on heating bills and in many other ways. The Government should think about that. I hope that we can debate the issue more fully and not deal just with the financial aspects.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have referred to law and order. One of the problems is the relationship between the police and the public. I am surprised to be able to stand here and say that I have spoken to the recently retired commander of the region in which I live, to the current commander and to the Police Federation and have found them as one: they are all concerned about the lack of confidence and trust that the public have in the police. I am not saying what has brought that about, but if we are to prevent crime and, indeed, correct the effects of crime, the public must be able to have confidence in the police and be prepared to work with them, rather than viewing them as an alien force to be treated with suspicion.

There is also the continuing scandal that, after 14 years of Conservative administration, an increasing number of people still suffer from low pay. Perhaps the Leader of the House will consider the deleterious effect of that on the economy at a time when stringent efforts are being made to improve it.

One of the main problems that I come across in my constituency is that of housing. For many years, my constituency had a wonderful public housing record. However, the council has lost more than one third of its housing stock, so families who need housing or rehousing find themselves in difficulty because there is a diminishing housing stock. The Government need to think hard about

[Mr. Etherington]

that, because the housing position is probably worse than at any time in the past 20 years. It is no good the Prime Minister saying, "We are providing the homeless with new cardboard boxes"—we need something definite and effective.

There is also the problem of an aging population—and that, too, is not being dealt with properly. As time goes on, there will be more and more old people and they will be living longer. There is no sign of a concerted effort to try to alleviate the problems before they fully arise. I am thinking of preventive medicine rather than running repairs, which unfortunately is the way the national health service now operates.

The next problem relates to the future education of our children. The Government wax eloquent about the benefits of grant-maintained schools, but they have never fully explained to the House what effect that policy has on local authorities which have to deal with children with special needs. That problem must be dealt with urgently.

Like everyone else, I am pleased that the recession appears to be coming to an end, but there still remains the problem of unemployment. We could spend many weeks debating that subject in this House, because even during the relatively prosperous late 1980s unemployment was still rising. Within that increasing unemployment, there are horrendous regional variations. We are told that currently male unemployment is 14·1 per cent.—that has led to many screams from prosperous areas—but in my constituency male unemployment has stood at more than 21 per cent. for the past 15 years.

No one in the Government has said how, at the end of the recession and with the increasing prosperity that we all hope to achieve, we can get rid of the regional variations. Until something is done about that, there will be a self-perpetuating system of deprivation in certain areas. The country will never be united under those circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) did not please me too much with the length of his speech, but he pleased me with the efforts that he is making to get rid of one of the biggest scandals in Britain: the Government's continuing failure to deal with large firms which break the law on Sunday trading. Whatever people's views on my hon. Friend's Bill, at least he is trying to deal with the problem—which is more than the Government are doing.

There have been years and years of law breaking by those firms, with no prospect of that being put right in the foreseeable future. I cannot help but think that, if those companies were not pouring vast sums of money into Conservative party coffers, the Government might take a different attitude. If a trade union or a Labour council was breaking the law, the Government would act within minutes, never mind years. It is a disgrace, and something must be done about it.

I have greatly admired the Government's stance during recent talks on whaling. They have done what I believe the majority of people in this country wanted them to do, which is to act in a humane and responsible manner. However, it would be better if the Government were to allow hon. Members to decide properly, and without obstruction, whether they want to put an end once and for all to the barbaric so-called sport of hunting. Any country which hunts down animals in the way Britain does can never expect to have the respect of the rest of the world as a decent and good nation. The same applies to the unnecessary vivisection which continues in Britain.

I have not tried to deal with the items on my list in order of merit, and I have missed out one or two to save time, but I come now to the last one and I declare a personal interest. Having waited for more than a year for a hernia to be put right, I cannot help but wonder about those who are suffering more pain and serious injury than I am and who might have had to wait a similar length of time.

Recently I noted that the Northern regional health authority was vociferous about how it had cut waiting lists of those waiting for more than a year and for more than two years, but in the past 12 months the overall waiting list of hospitals in the nrothern region has risen by 10·3 per cent. At that rate, we can expect them to double in the next seven years. Instead of spending so much time on public relations exercises and putting out glossy brochures explaining how good hospital trusts are, if some of that money had been spent trying to put people right I am sure that everyone concerned would feel much happier.

That brings me to my conclusion. I have not spoken for so long as some hon. Members and I have tried to say what little I had to say in as succinct a manner as possible. As I said at the outset, I hope that the Government will consider introducing legislation to ensure that no one speaks for longer than 10 minutes in the House at any time, thus giving everyone else a chance.

5.51 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for letting me catch your eye. I want to concentrate briefly on one issue. I want to draw the attention of the Leader of the House and his colleagues to the IACS fiasco—the integrated administration and control system. For those hon. Members who do not have farmers in their constituency, I have in my hand the sort of material that has landed on the kitchen table of farmers all over the country. That is the wodge of material that they now have to wade through to qualify for important support.

The so-called integrated administration and control system has become an essential component for a large majority of British farmers to enable them to obtain area aid and arable, beef and suckler cow support. As the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) has already said, there is widespread dismay at the way in which, as usual, the British version seems to be worse than that of any other EC member state.

The Library made a simple analysis for me of the sort of forms and explanatory booklets that were provided for farmers in other states. I take two examples. Denmark had an eight-page explanatory booklet, a four-page form and a four-page additional advice leaflet. France, which we sometimes think is very bureaucratic, had an eight-page explanatory booklet and a four-page form.

In Scotland, I am given to understand, not only was the documentation available earlier than it was in England and Wales, but the booklet of explanation was shorter. There is a persistent rumour that the difference between England and Wales on the one hand and Scotland on the other is that the Minister himself insisted on simplifying the explanatory booklet for England and Wales, with the result that it was issued several weeks late to farmers and

it was several pages longer. As a result, farmers in England and Wales were faced with an extraordinary booklet 79 pages long and 12-plus pages of forms. A new verb has been added to the English language—to gummer. Farmers feel that they have been gummered by the bureaucracy.

The problem has been made a great deal worse by the tight timetable that farmers have had to meet to complete the forms. The deadline was last Saturday, 15 May. In the run-up to that deadline and over the weekend, quite rightly agricultural correspondents on the national newspapers drew attention to what was happening. *The Daily Telegraph* said:

"MAFF + IACS + CAP spell DISASTER".

The well-known and respected member of the political profession as well as of the journalistic profession, Mr. Bill Deedes, referred to

"Mr. Gummer's 11b sleeping pill".

The Guardian said:

"EC paperwork send farmers to the edge of sensibility".

An interesting article based on some notes that were supplied to *The Daily Telegraph* was headed:

"Never trust those rude farmers, officials are told".

That concerned instructions to Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials for dealing with some of the farmers in our constituencies. Perhaps most significant of all was the diary of a farmer's wife in *The Sunday Telegraph*, headed:

"My sleepless nights over forms of torture".

Farmers all over the country have been faced with such appalling difficulties.

In the farming press, the comments have been even more earthy and it would not be appropriate to quote some of them here. However, I shall quote one or two of the most respectable. For example, *Farming News* said:

"Will Europe sleep while Britain fills in form?"

Farmers' Weekly said:

"Now comes map muck-up in the IACS saga".

Best of all, *Farmers' Weekly* said:

"Caught napping from mapping".

The farmers themselves—some of us have had much correspondence with them—are outraged by the extent to which the demands for information have come at such a busy time of the year. I quote from a letter, typical of many, from a farmer in my constituency. It states:

"Our forms were received on 8th April for completion by May 15th, (5½ weeks). We then had to apply for the 'Arable Area Payments' Explanatory Booklet' (44 pages), and get to grips with 'CAP Reform in the Beef Sector' (24 pages), so that the options could be assessed within the context of the IACS booklet (79 pages); ie, the maze and then the minefield. We attended NFU advice meeting for 2½ hours. We queued for maps, (costing £130), for 6 hours in Exeter, (a round trip of 100 miles). We found the maps incomplete (still costing £18·50 each); old versions with the measurements and grid reference numbers but the survey 40 years out of date; new versions resurveyed but giving no measurements or grid references. We had to have fields measured on one map where hedges had been removed nearly 40 years ago; we had to have one new map measured where the re-survey had created different boundaries. Finally when we had done our best we queued for three hours in Launceston for MAFF to check and advise on our completed efforts.

We have actually incurred the loss of a full working week at a most hectic time in the farming year, in an effort to piece together the information required from ill-conceived and ill-prepared material.

I am then obliged to listen to the arrogance and self-righteous conceit of our farm minister, who imputes that problems arising are the farmers' fault, and that they will be heavily penalised for any mistakes that occur".

My constituent concludes:

"Farming has become a computer-game, floundering in a quagmire of new strictures and technologically derived directives, and I just hope that IACS does not prove to be the ultimate virus of lunacy totally to undermine, (rather than under-pin), the CAP."

That is typical of, but rather more articulate than, many of the letters that I am sure Conservative Members have been receiving from their farming constituents.

Hon. Members may say and Ministers may attempt to excuse the situation by saying that there was plenty of warning. But I was promised from the Dispatch Box on 25 March that the documentation would be in the hands of farmers on 2 April—the actual date was given—so that they would have more than six weeks to meet the deadline of 15 May. In fact, a sizeable number received their documentation 10 or 14 days after that date, breaking that promise, so they had fewer than six weeks to assemble information and obtain the supporting material, especially accurate maps from Ordnance Survey.

Moreover, there were major mistakes and misprints in some of the documents, so it had to go back for checking. Despite months of warning, Ordnance Survey—an executive agency, after all—was caught totally unprepared. Increased staff at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, a huge waste of effort and a huge diversion of precious time have been achieved, at huge cost, by the Minister.

Conscious of the likelihood that there would be some late submissions—with all this muddle, there were bound to be honest mistakes by those completing the forms—hon. Members from other parties and I asked the Minister for some leniency and, crucially, for an independent appeals system. Those who had made genuine mistakes or who, because of the late arrival of forms, had been unable to make accurate submissions in time were entitled to some consideration. At Question Time on 29 April, the Minister dismissed that suggestion out of hand. In those circumstances, it is right that we should seek the support of the ombudsman, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, with a view to having the role of MAFF and Ordnance Survey investigated.

I do not propose to deal at great length with the latest insult that has been added to this injury, as I raised the matter with Madam Speaker this afternoon. The fact that the Minister refused yesterday to give me figures in answer to a parliamentary question, despite being prepared to allow them to be given to outside bodies and the media, is outrageous and demonstrates contempt for the House. Specific figures were quoted in "Farming Today" this morning.

It seems that, in England alone, up to one quarter—certainly one fifth—of all eligible farmers have submitted completed forms on time. Who can blame them, given the shambles that the Minister has allowed to develop? Yesterday's *Western Morning News*, under the headline "Farmers Could Lose Grants", made the point that the very livelihood of many farmers may be at stake as a result of this maladministration. The National Farmers Union chairman in my county has drawn attention to the ridiculous fact that one of his fields features in 44 separate boxes in the documentation. That complexity makes it extremely difficult for farmers to complete forms on time.

As we approach the Adjournment for the spring recess, many farmers all over the country are under a threatening cloud. They face not just difficulty, confusion and expenditure of time, but real loss. It is a penalty that could

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

do great damage to their business at a time when they are coming out of the worst recession that the industry has known since the 1930s.

I hope that the Leader of the House will take account of the fact that this is an expensive and oppressive shambles. I hope that he will encourage his ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to apologise not just to the farming community but also to the House for the way in which this system has been handled. They should demonstrate real remorse and proper recognition of the problems that have been caused. I hope that the Leader of the House will insist that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food comes forward before the spring recess with a statement that he is prepared to set up an independent appeals system.

6.3 pm

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): This House should not adjourn without debating education, which is one of the most important subjects with which politicians have to deal. Education is the means by which individuals succeed, and the means by which we shall succeed as a nation. If we get it right, we shall resolve all our problems of wealth creation, the care of pensioners and the provision of a better health service; if we do not get it right, we shall never be able to make proper provision in those areas.

The most important part of education is the primary sector. That is where the three essential lessons are learned of disciplines, skills and enthusiasm for education, yet it is at that level that funding is most scarce. I want to draw attention to the discrepancy, in this regard, between the primary sector and the secondary sector.

The Select Committee on Education has chosen this subject for a major inquiry, which is to commence quite soon. I hope that that inquiry will be a means of directing the attention of the House to this subject.

The Leader of the House, who is listening very carefully to my remarks, is an Essex Member of Parliament, so I shall refer to the funding split between primary education and secondary education in Essex, which has quite simply got it wrong. The local management of schools formula, by which funds are distributed between those sectors, is wrong. The age-weighted pupil unit in the secondary sector is quite generous, but at the expense of the age-weighted pupil unit in the primary sector.

Statistics produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which are available in the Library, show that, during the last year whose figures I have analysed, Essex paid about £80 a year below the comparable shire county average for each primary pupil. In my constituency, that means about £20,000 a year per primary school. Thus, we have vertical integration—mixed-year group teaching, the mixing of nine-year-olds with 10-year-olds—which cannot be effective.

I want Essex—indeed, I want the nation—to look at the funding disparity between primary education and secondary education, so that we may get the balance right. It is at the primary level that the essential lessons are learned.

6.6 pm

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): The remarks I should like to make would take much longer than the four minutes that remain for this debate.

I wish to focus on an issue that gives rise to great concern in my constituency—local government reorganisation in Wales. On 1 March, the Secretary of State for Wales made proposals which, because they are fundamentally flawed, must be drawn to the attention of the House before it goes into recess on 27 May. The proposals are flawed in many respects, but I should like to deal with four problems.

First, what is proposed continues the Government's privatisation plans, which represent dogma of the highest order and ought to be resisted by people in my constituency. Secondly, the proposals will result in reduced representation in the new authorities. A major gap is the complete absence of plans for a Welsh assembly. The Welsh Office spends £6,000 million a year, and an army of quangos runs Wales. So much for democratic accountability. Those bodies are accountable entirely to three Ministers, who put forward their views without any reference to the people of Wales, who elected 27 Labour Members of Parliament on 9 April last year.

In my constituency, the most pressing question is boundaries. Delyn borough council, in conjunction with Alyn and Deeside district council, advanced consensus proposals for a merger of the two authorities. The Alyn and Deeside council is Labour-controlled, whereas the Delyn council is not. Despite that fact, one of my abiding memories is of the leaders of the two councils shaking hands and agreeing that the best thing for my constituency was a consensus authority.

Despite the agreement among councillors in the area, the Secretary of State has proposed a new Flintshire authority and a new Denbighshire authority, which would be responsible for half of the area of the current Delyn borough council. This has provoked a response—letters, representations, petitions—such as I have not had previously since my election to this House.

The communities of Whitford, Gwernaffield, Gwernymynydd, Halkyn, Mostyn, Llanasa, Nercwys, Cilcain, Nannerch, Ysceifiog and Caerwys have all said very clearly that they wish to be part of the Flintshire authority. It is a matter of history, of geography, of just belonging, but, most of all, of the delivery of services. The main towns of Flint, Holywell and Mold in my constituency will be divorced from the rural hinterland that surrounds them. A whole list of services, such as libraries, schools, housing, leisure centres and transport will be in one authority. The 16,000 people who will be in the proposed Denbighshire authority will be divorced from their libraries, their transport, their leisure services and their community housing.

Denbighshire will be a 71,000 authority if the 16,000 people whom I wish to see in Flintshire are put into it. I urge the Secretary of State for Wales to take on board the strong feelings of my community for self-determination, and I urge that the 16,000 residents in my constituency who look to Flintshire and to the towns of Flint, Holywell and Mold for their public services get them. Before the recess begins, I urge the Secretary of State, in preparing his local government Bill, which will be introduced after the

recess, to do so on the basis of the wishes of my local community. I urge him to include a Welsh Assembly and fair representation—a basic good deal for my constituents.

6.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) has made a powerful and able contribution to the debate, as have other members of the parliamentary Labour party. I thank them for their contribution. The parliamentary Labour party believes that the House should not adjourn until the industrial crisis facing Tyneside has been discussed here. So that such a discussion is better informed, I shall place on the record some points about the helicopter carrier and about the events that led up to the decision on the contract.

Swan Hunter and Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. submitted bids for the landing platform helicopter vessel last autumn. Swan Hunter's bid was for a purpose-built warship; VSEL's bid was for what was essentially a merchant vessel with a flat top which would be built at Govan and would go to Barrow-in-Furness for armaments to be added and for outfitting. Contrary to popular belief, there was not much difference in price between the two initial submissions. As I understand it, Swan Hunter's bid was about £174 million and VSEL's bid was £165 million, leaving a difference between the two of about £9 million. That sum would have been more than covered by the difference in costs to the Ministry of Defence of supervising the Govan-VSEL bid in the different yards. I accept that that would not have been an insuperable obstacle. My point is that last autumn the two bids were similar.

From then on, the Ministry of Defence entered clarification discussions with Swan Hunter and with VSEL to talk about the designs and especially to talk about additional equipment and changes that it required to be made. The crucial point is that it was the Ministry of Defence that required additional changes to the vessel. Swan Hunter is a management buy-out company; it has no large financial reserves. Additional equipment going into the vessel means an addition to the price. On the reasonable and logical assumption that VSEL was being asked to make the same changes, it would know the cost of those changes and would know within reason how that movement would be reflected in Swan Hunter's price.

Unlike Swan Hunter, VSEL has massive financial resources, which have been built up on the profits of the Trident submarine contract. That contract is essentially a cost-plus contract which has left VSEL with a large financial surplus. As well as adding £12·5 million to the contract to raise the standard of weapons systems from the initial bid, the Ministry of Defence altered the specifications for the carrier to require a further £13 million of work to be added to the original Swan Hunter bid. That, with other positive and negative adjustments, took Swan Hunter's price to between £195 million and £200 million.

It is important to emphasise that that price reflects the real cost of changes demanded by the Ministry of Defence. It does not reflect any new adjustments of profitability on the contract, as alleged in the local press by another Member of Parliament. The *Sunday Sun*, the local Sunday newspaper on Tyneside, carried the story under the headline:

"A bid too far by debt-hit Swan's Cash crisis forced yard to jack up offer says MP".

That is not true. At no time, as I understand it, did the Ministry of Defence suggest to Swan Hunter that the cost of making the changes and additions that the Ministry required should be borne by the company. Nor was it suggested that the company's costs were unreasonable.

As a result of the size of the order and of the relative weakness of Swan Hunter's financial base, the company has been talking to other major British companies with defence industry interests with a view to a closer association. There is obvious logic to that and I was not, and still am not, opposed to that.

I now understand that the talks have been going on for far longer than I realised, certainly since the latter half of last year. The Ministry of Defence was not only aware of the talks, but apparently took the view that the LPH order would be placed at Swan Hunter only if the company was taken over by a major defence industry contractor, almost certainly GEC. My personal view is that a lot of good could have come to Tyneside from a GEC takeover of Swan Hunter, going beyond the narrow question of the LPH order.

It is important for the House to know, however, that the pressure on the directors of Swan Hunter was ultimately not commercially driven, but came directly from the Ministry of Defence. As the final bids for the LPH were submitted on 22 April this year, the Swan Hunter bid moved from about £200 million, give or take £5 million. A more pessimistic view was taken collectively of the overheads that had to be applied to the bid, moving the price up to the £210 million figure that is already in the public domain. That last-minute change was the result of a pessimistic view about other work coming into the yard to cover some of the overheads before work started on the LPH. The Ministry of Defence did not ask for the last item to be revised downwards.

VSEL was in a different commercial position and could take a different view of the charging of overheads. VSEL would know that with Swan Hunter running out of work, the directors had no alternative but to carry the bulk of the overhead costs on the LPH contract. With the Trident programme still in progress at Barrow-in-Furness, no such problem faced the directors of VSEL. The £50 million price difference that the Ministry of Defence is ruthlessly briefing as the real gap in price between the Swan Hunter and VSEL bids means that the VSEL price must have stayed at its original £165 million or thereabouts.

I believe that I heard the Secretary of State for Defence mention £160 million on BBC radio last Thursday. In other words, the additional work that the Ministry required Swan Hunter to do and which had to be paid for in the Swan Hunter contract has been absorbed into the VSEL contract, underpinned by the company's enormous profits on Trident. Clearly the Ministry of Defence would know all those facts.

In the number of different warring factions that make up the Ministry, there are those—essentially in the Royal Navy—who believe in amphibiosity and the helicopter carrier. Others would prefer the amphibious programme to be delayed, if not actually scrapped. Such issues justify the Labour party in its call for a defence review. Conservative Defence Ministers scoff at the call for a defence review. What is not so well known is that the Ministry is carrying out such a review on the quiet. A group of senior officials and one politician in the

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

Department—a gang of four—meet under the nomenclature of the "internal study group", which in effect is conducting a secret defence review. It is especially considering strategic questions such as the amphibious programme and surplus capacity in the warship-building industry.

No doubt it is also considering the logical consequences of its ordering programme on capacity, and even which shipyards will close and which will stay open. It has always been the case that the Ministry of Defence could reduce shipbuilding capacity by delaying warship orders. The Public Accounts Committee has pointed that out and has called for a better working relationship between the Ministry's strategic decision-makers and the industry so that the industry can have more certainty in its forward planning.

The House will remember that the original fight for the LPH related to keeping it in the programme. It seems clearer now than it did then that powerful forces were at work within the Ministry of Defence to delay or scrap the amphibious programme and permanently to take out what they regarded as surplus capacity in the shipbuilding industry. The first move towards taking out surplus capacity was to starve the industry of work and to close the most vulnerable yard. Because of its work load, that yard was Swan Hunter. The successful fight put up by the work force and management of Swan Hunter for the order, and the present position in Yugoslavia, made an overwhelming case for amphibiosity and the helicopter carrier.

The Royal Navy wants and needs the helicopter carrier in its programme. The industry's opponents decided to achieve the same objective of removing capacity, but in a different way by arranging the contract so that it was open to VSEL to hold its price while leaving Swan Hunter with no option but to have its price pushed up by additional requests for add-ons. The price gap was made inevitable and gave the Government an excuse to look surprised and aghast at the price difference and close Swan Hunter.

Whatever else those tendering arrangements may be called, they can hardly be called fair competition. The final decision, as I understand it, was taken last Monday by a small number of Cabinet Ministers, including the Secretary of State for Defence, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the President of the Board of Trade and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has told the House that the Government brought the helicopter carrier forward so that Swan Hunter could bid for it. If that is so, it is remarkable that the Government took the decision on price and compliance without pausing to look behind the two bids: how they were constructed and how the price difference had come about.

The awful truth probably is that there were those in the Ministry of Defence and higher up in Government who never had any intention of letting Swan Hunter win the contract and that the construction of the bids was designed to ensure that Swan Hunter did not win it. The fact that the Ministry of Defence is now briefing to the effect that the Government wanted to save Swan Hunter but could not do so because of the price and that this price increase is all the fault of the company's management adds fuel to the suspicion. The fact that the management of VSEL are this afternoon trying to get the three frigates towed out of Swan Hunter and round to Barrow is yet more cause for suspicion.

I do not believe that there is a shipyard worker in the country who will set foot on Swan Hunter's frigates in these circumstances. The work force at Swan Hunter is working normally and intends to finish the frigates on Tyneside on time and to the highest standard. The Ministry of Defence should let it do so.

I welcome today's call for an inquiry. That call has come from the Defence Select Committee. I understand that the inquiry is to be conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General. I can think of nobody better fitted to conduct the inquiry.

Among the matters that the inquiry could consider, and indeed should consider, is the question of how the two tenders were evaluated. The inquiry could consider whether both bids deal with detailed questions of compliance. It could also consider the dialogue between the Ministry of Defence and both contractors about price, whether both bids were for a ship to be built to Royal Navy standards and, if not, whether British services personnel are, in effect, being sent into combat in a customised cargo vessel.

The inquiry should also consider the level of merchant shipbuilding subsidy available to Kvaerner Govan and whether it was indirectly applied to the LPH contract. Most important of all, the inquiry should reach conclusions about the level of subsidy in the VSEL bid and about competition policy.

The inquiry will, however, undoubtedly confirm the following brutal truths. Only Governments procure warships. Therefore, by holding back the programme, Governments can close warship yards. Ultimately, the issue is about political decision making. The Ministry of Defence's secret defence review being conducted by the internal study group has decided permanently to end warship building on Tyneside. Last week it got its way. The management and work force of Swan Hunter are being punished for having done everything that the Conservative party asked them to do, post privatisation.

The effects are devastating for Tyneside. The collapse of Swan Hunter will bring other companies down with it. Sustained high levels of unemployment will cost the taxpayer more in lost revenue and in benefit payments than the cost of the contract. Most damaging of all, the Prime Minister has deprived Tyneside of its work and its future and has done so in a peculiarly cruel and malevolent way.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), with whom I do not usually agree, is right to give credit for the decision to the Prime Minister. He did so in last Tuesday's edition of the *Evening Chronicle*. In its early edition, the *Evening Chronicle* reported:

"Mr. Trotter was giving much of the credit for the 20,000 tonne vessel order to Mr. Major himself."

For once, the *Evening Chronicle* is right and it has provided the epitaph for the destruction of Tyneside's industrial base: the Prime Minister deserves most of the credit.

6.24 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): During the past three hours there have been times when I thought we were having a re-run of the debate that took place about a week

ago on VAT on fuel and that we were anticipating two debates that are due to take place tomorrow on the defence industries and on sub-post offices, in connection with automated credit transfers. I hope that I shall be forgiven if I do not attempt a re-run of last week's ministerial speeches and do not anticipate speeches that will be made in tomorrow's debates.

I want, however, to say something about the two issues that have featured in many of the speeches that have been made today: first, the need to provide appropriate help, particularly to pensioners, in respect of VAT on fuel and, secondly, sub-post offices.

It is important for me to underline the clear undertakings that were given about the Government's intention to provide extra help to poorer pensioners and others on low incomes, on the basis of details that will be given in the autumn statement when they have been carefully worked through. It is important also to underline, in view of comments made by my hon. Friends, that the increases in the income support thresholds and rates do not help only those on income support. The structure of the system leads to help feeding through to other income-related benefits—to housing benefit and council tax benefit in particular.

That leads to far more people being assisted than just those on income support. It is estimated that about 8 million people will benefit from increases in the income support rates. I hope that my hon. Friends will note that point, which was emphasised in last week's debate. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General commented on the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) and adverted to the point that I have just made.

Sub-post offices have been mentioned by almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate. The issue was raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery), for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), and for Corby, for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and by the hon. Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington).

I hope that I have not missed out any hon. Member who referred to sub-post offices. I hope that they were all present at Prime Minister's Question Time today when my right hon. Friend clearly reiterated the comments of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Technology on Friday, when he underlined the fact that we are committed to the maintenance of a viable network of post offices.

My right hon. Friend went on to say that pensioners will continue to be able to receive their pensions from the post office. He repeated something else that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Technology said in Friday's Adjournment debate on the subject: that it is not Government policy to remove the right of pensioners to receive their pensions from the post office. Those are clear statements of the Government's position. They will no doubt be more extensively covered in tomorrow's debate. They should, however, go a long way towards reassuring my hon. Friends.

I intend now to turn, though perhaps not as fully as he would like, to what was said by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown)—I suspect at least as much in his capacity as the Member of Parliament of a north-eastern constituency, which is much affected by the difficulties to which he referred, as in his capacity as an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. He will know that I cannot, and do not, accept some of the suggestions that he made about the motivation and actions of those involved in this very difficult decision.

I have no doubt that much more will be said in tomorrow's debate, but my understanding is absolutely clear: VSEL won the competition by a substantial margin —tens of millions of pounds—and against that background it would have been unfair to it, to the Royal Navy and to the taxpayer to award the contract elsewhere. Its bid fully met the specification against which both companies tendered, and that must be taken into account.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East knows that I had a long and close connection—although, in some respects, not as long as I should have liked—with the north-east and shipbuilding on Wearside as a Trade and Industry Minister four or five years ago. I need no lessons in the problems that the area experiences or, indeed, in the feelings to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I spent a year doing my level best to preserve shipbuilding on Wearside, but, to my great regret, I was unsuccessful.

I understand the feelings that have been articulated this afternoon, but I do not think that any good purpose is served by suggesting that there has been a conspiracy or that my right hon. and hon. Friends have acted with less than integrity and good will in their approach to this difficult decision. I hope that some recognition will be given, as I am sure it will be in tomorrow's debate, to the measures that were announced almost immediately to seek to build new economic opportunities in the area, such as those that are operating so successfully in the north-east, the flagship of which is the Nissan factory, which is almost within sight of the former shipyards on the Wear and is a symbol of the new opportunities in the north-east.

I hope that it is clear that I say that not in a bland way, but having recognised the concerns and the background to which the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East referred. However, he does neither his constituents nor the House any service by talking in quite the terms that he did about the difficult decision that had to be made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale referred to his meeting with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health about Trafford community hospital, but he told me little about its contents. I must therefore respond with some caution. I hope that it will prove possible to reflect the concerns that he expressed, but I am not sure that I should endorse his request to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to ignore the mysterious K. Riley. However, as it appears that nobody can trace K. Riley, it seems likely that my right hon. Friend will have to ignore him or her, as my hon. Friend wishes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale also mentioned affordable housing. The cost reductions achieved through lower interest rates and competitive prices in recent years have made possible a reduction in average grant rates, without any significant impact on the affordability of the rents implied by those grant rates. He will know that the Government have expressed the objective of increasing the proportion of private finance in new schemes still further by reducing grant rates in 1994-95 and 1995-96, and before final decisions on grant rates for 1994-95 are taken a full assessment will be made of the likely impact on rents and housing associations' ability to raise private finance.

[Mr. Tony Newton]

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who evidently has been unable to return for my speech, made a number of comments about the inquiry into the tragic episodes that arose from the crimes of which Beverly Allitt was recently convicted. I should repeat what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said earlier this afternoon in response to the suggestion that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is not taking her responsibilities seriously in the inquiry that has been established.

The terms of reference of the Clothier inquiry are so wide-ranging that it would take too much time if I were to attempt to read them. They cover the inquiry into the circumstances that led to the deaths of the children and the need to consider the speed and appropriateness of the clinical and managerial response; to examine the appointment procedures, systems of assessment and supervision in the relevant bodies; to review the recommendations of the regional fact-finding inquiry into paediatric services at the hospital; and to consider such other matters relating to the incidents as the public interest may require.

Sir Cecil Clothier—a person of considerable experience and distinction in this area—will be joined by Miss Anne MacDonald, director of quality at the Royal Manchester children's hospital and a distinguished paediatric nurse, and Professor David Shaw, emeritus professor of clinical neurology at the university of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a considerable inquiry and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said this afternoon, it is right to respond to Sir Cecil's own view that people will be more willing to speak freely to his inquiry than to a public inquiry and that his is the most appropriate way of proceeding.

The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington referred to the problems of prostitution. I hope that it was clear to her from hon. Members' reactions that no hon. Member was dismissing or making light of her concerns, as at some points in her speech she suggested. Indeed, the Government are keen to tighten the law on kerb crawling and will seek a suitable legislative opportunity to try to reintroduce legislation following the failure of the Sexual Offences Bill in 1990, which was moved by the former Member for Streatham. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) observed, it was talked out by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

I shall not be able to say a great deal about Sunday trading, but the hon. Member for Ogmore suggested that difficulties with private Member's Bills are confined to Bills about which the Government are not enthusiastic. The procedures for dealing with private Member's Bills are well known and well established, and Opposition Members cause at least as much difficulty with such business as Conservative Members.

Of course it is open to the Procedure Committee, if it wishes, to reconsider those procedures and for the House to adjust them, if it wishes, but some of the remarks that were made by the hon Member for Ogmore were a bit over the top. The same applies to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, who attributed bad motives or behaviour to Ministers in their approach to what has been a reasonably straightforward matter.

As that is one of the particularly important subjects that was raised in the debate, and in view of the suggestions of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East about lengthy delay, I remind him of the speech, which he must have heard, that was made last Friday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, in which he said:

> "The Government intend to introduce a Bill early in the next Session. I can confirm that we intend, well before the summer recess, to publish a Bill with the major choices in it, together with a commentary describing that those major choices would do in practice and how they would be enforced." [*Official Report*, 14 May 1993, Vol. 224, c. 1070.]

It remains my view that that is the sensible and responsible way for the Government to proceed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South, apart from touching on one of the issues that I have already mentioned, suggested an initiative that he felt the Government should take in respect of Bosnia, which I shall bring to the attention of right hon. and hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend made a number of less than flattering comments about the proposals of the Banham local government commission, and I am sure that he will understand if I respond somewhat cautiously, but one of the merits of the way in which the commission was set up and is now operating is that it was given terms of reference that allowed it to consider local circumstances and to take account of local concerns. My hon. Friend clearly does not like what has emerged so far. He has expressed, with some vigour and enthusiasm, some local concerns and I am sure that the commission and my right hon. and hon. Friends who will have to take decisions on these matters in due course, will have heard and listened to what he said.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) followed up a question he asked me last week about the security services. I cannot give him the guarantee of a debate, any more than I could last Thursday, although I would not be as dismissive as he was of the vigorous remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. However, since one of the hon. Member's concerns was apparently that GCHQ staff could not answer back and that that generated the need for a debate, I would make the point that they would not be able to answer back in a debate either. At best, he might be able to answer back on their behalf, and he has been doing that fairly effectively in the House.

Perhaps this is a slightly lower key way of making the point that my right hon. and learned Friend Home Secretary has made on a number of occasions, but the Government are satisfied that GCHQ has not been involved in the surveillance of the royal family.

I have managed to touch on one or two of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton. There was a moment in his speech when I was not sure whether his focus was the newspapers or the Government. Perhaps I might assume that it was the newspapers and not the Government and move hastily on to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)—who once attacked me for not getting round to his speech, and I shall do so by only a fraction this afternoon. He was concerned about the legalisation, or at least with considering the legalisation——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Mr. Tony Banks: It was certainly very fractional.

Mr. Newton: I did at least get round to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 22 (Periodic Adjournments).*

The House divided: Ayes 158, Noes 39.

Division No. 274] **[6.41 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Allen, Graham
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Cryer, Bob
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Eastham, Ken
Flynn, Paul
Gordon, Mildred
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Illsley, Eric
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Oiner, William
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. Nigel Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 27th May, do adjourn until Monday 7th June.

Orders of the Day

Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Lennox-Boyd.]*

6.52 pm

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I should like to reiterate Opposition support for the Bill, which is designed to provide compensation for those unfortunate people affected by Saddam Hussein's brutal invasion of Kuwait. We hope that the Government and the United Nations Compensation Commission will give priority to dealing with the claims as speedily as possible.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) has been assiduously pursuing for a long time the claim of one of his constituents, Mrs. Major. I congratulate him on that. Can the Minister tell us when that case is likely to be given some priority in the compensation process?

In Committee, fundamental questions were raised. Although the Minister answered each point, a number of his replies were inadequate, perhaps because the relevant facts were not available. Perhaps the Minister can now provide us with up-to-date information on the major outstanding issues.

I expressed concern in Committee about the funding of the claims. United Nations resolution 687 called for a percentage of Iraq's oil revenue to be held back and paid into a fund from which people entitled to compensation would receive their money. As I understand it, however, no money at all has been paid into the fund, other than $21 million sequestrated by the American Government from funds that were already in the United States of America.

What new measures do the Government and the United Nations propose to introduce to enforce United Nations resolution 687 in respect of oil sales by Iraq which are in direct conflict to it? The terms of the resolution lay down that all sales of oil ought to be through, or supervised by, the United Nations, so that 30 per cent. of the revenue will go towards compensation. The issue of oil sales by Iraq was raised in Committee, and the Minister stated that there was some evidence at that time that Iraq was illegally and improperly subverting the resolution by selling oil, either directly or through other parties. Can the Minister elaborate briefly on that?

Unless some action is taken, I fear that the constituent of the hon. Member for Test is unlikely to receive any money. The Minister mentioned in Committee that $21 million had been sequestrated by American officials from Iraqi assets. Is it possible for us to do some sequestration? Certainly, when it came to the funds of the miners' union during the miners' strike, the Government were able to introduce legislation very rapidly to sequestrate the miners' assets; perhaps they could show the same assiduousness in sequestrating the assets of Saddam Hussein. The Government probably regard the miners of Great Britain as a much greater danger than Saddam Hussein. Will the Minister tell us whether we, or any other country involved in this problem, intend to take the same action as the United States?

The significance of those questions is obvious because unless adequate steps are taken to ensure the proper funding of the United Nations Compensation Commission, any debate that we have here or elsewhere on the mechanics of dealing with individual claims or claims from businesses and companies will be academic. The claimants include businesses that lost out when they were taken over in Kuwait and businesses that believe that they lost potential work when Saddam Hussein invaded.

I understand from the statistics given in Committee that, of the 3,000 United Kingdom claims—2,000 from individuals and 1,000 from companies—about 1,000 only have been processed by the United Nations Compensation Commission. I wonder whether the Minister can clarify why just one third of those claims have been forwarded by the Government.

Under the Bill, as drafted, the process for compensation was fairly slow but the Bill, as amended, now adds another dimension to the compensation process, because a claim must go through the Government to the United Nations Compensation Commission. If the process becomes even slower, it will be an awful long time before people get the money to which they are entitled.

Can the Minister provide a breakdown of the number of United Kingdom claims that are now being actively considered by the commission? That information would enable us to determine whether the Minister's strong commitment in Committee—to the effect that, if compensation were paid out, it should be paid to individuals first and then to companies and businesses—had been upheld. I understand that the United Nations resolution encapsulates that principle, but the only way in which it can be properly implemented is by monitoring the process properly. Are those expedited categories being monitored now?

The Opposition welcome the aims of the Bill, but it is important that UN resolution 687 is enforced, otherwise the structure of the UN Compensation Commission and the reason behind the Bill will be undermined. We are anxious to ensure that the commission continues to operate on the criteria it was set up to serve, namely, to compensate all those affected—physically, mentally and financially—by the brutal aggression pursued by Iraq and Saddam Hussein in the invasion of Kuwait.

7 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The case I wish to raise has been going on for some time, and I will describe the background. An ex-sergeant in the Royal Engineers and his wife and daughter went to Iraq and stayed in Baghdad. He worked for a civil engineering firm named W. S. Atkins. When he wanted to leave, Saddam Hussein said that the would let only the wife and daughter go. The man was kept prisoner and, shortly afterwards, died of a heart attack.

Mrs. Major, the lady in question, suddenly found that, from having a very adequate income, she had none at all. The authorities foreclosed on her home in the United Kingdom. The family had a retirement home in Spain in which she intended to live, but the authorities foreclosed on that, too. The civil engineering firm acted in a very honourable way and helped as much as it could, but at the end of the day, the family was left penniless.

I have with me a letter from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office dated 27 August 1992. Although it

made clear that the Department was processing the claim —I accept that it was helpful, and I thank the Minister for his help in the matter—it said in the last paragraph:

"Every possible pressure is being maintained by the United Nations Security Council to ensure that Saddam Hussein fulfils all the international obligations he has brought upon himself".

We have reached the stage where the family has received every possible help from the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association and is now living in penury. That is not a good reward for a British citizen who went out to work for an engineering company. I get the impression that without a debate such as this, there would be no movement towards fulfilling what I regard as a moral obligation to help many individuals.

I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) that it must be a priority that individuals and families are compensated ahead of companies, many of which had great losses. We are talking about many millions of pounds. If Saddam Hussein were the sort of person one could approach, he could be asked for, say, 10 million barrels of oil to put into the compensation fund. But he has no regard for anything other than himself.

It was the worst possible scenario for the end of the Gulf war to leave that man in charge. We are not getting anywhere with him. I am sure that the Minister will say that Hussein will in no way compensate anyone and that we can only hope that the Government who comes after him will be more amenable. I wait anxiously for the Minister's response.

7.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): It might be helpful if I reply to this short debate by bringing hon. Members up to date on the current situation in regard to claims for compensation. I shall, in particular, refer to the constituency case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) and the points raised by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers).

I assure the House that the Government are doing their utmost, in concert with their coalition partners and through the United Nations, to ensure that compensation is paid at the earliest possible time to the claimants. As my hon. Friend the Member for Test recognises, against the obduracy of Saddam Hussein, it is not possible to say when that compensation will be available. But I can report the procedure and the up-to-date situation relating to the claims, which hon. Members will be reassured to hear are proceeding, even though there are by no means sufficient funds available at present for the payment of compensation to all the claimants.

The administrative arrangements in the United Nations Compensation Commission have progressed well since the cease fire in 1991, and particularly during the last 12 months. We have seen the establishment, first, of the claims criteria and, secondly, of the rules of procedure for assessing claims. Those two developments are significant. In the context of claims against other sovereign states for which I am responsible in the Foreign Office, the speed with which the machinery has been set up and the establishment of the rules for assessing claims has been quick in comparison with other situations.

After the establishment of the claims criteria and the rules of procedure for assessing claims, we have the commission, which is already working on a preliminary assessment of the claims it has received. In March, the commission gained approval for the appointment of a first panel of commissioners who will carry out the main assessment of claims.

We have no problems with the proposed method of assessment of claims which, in the case of individual claims, will involve the use of a comprehensive computer system. Legal officers of the commission will enter all the information on the claim forms into the computer. The commission is supported by experts, who will thus be able to deal with a large number of claims quickly, as a result of the expedited procedures. We hope that the form of assessment will commence in September and November of this year. That is when the commissioners are first due to meet to consider the assessment of claims.

We do not have sufficient funds available in the United Nations escrow account to pay all the claims. The hon. Member for Rhondda invited me to comment on how Iraq is surviving in the face of United Nations sanctions preventing the sale of oil, except through the procedures allowed by United Nations resolutions. We have no firm evidence to indicate that Iraq is exporting oil in breach of sanctions, but we have made clear to the Iranians and all Iraq's neighbours our views about the need to uphold the sanctions regime.

We are determined to keep up the pressure on Iraq to implement all the relevant Security Council resolutions in full, but Iraq continues flagrantly to deny United Nations authority across the board. We do not believe that any sanctions should be lifted until Iraq complies fully with all the relevant sanctions.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister said in Standing Committee:

"Iraq has not started to sell oil in the world markets under United Nations resolutions. I believe that the Iraqi Government have sold some oil outside United Nations monitoring, but they have not started to comply with United Nations resolutions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 2 March 1993; column 7.]

I gathered from that statement—the Minister would not have made it without some backing—that the Government had some evidence that Iraq was getting round the UN resolutions, under which Iraq is entitled to export $1·6 billion-worth of oil to pay for its own needs. If Iraq is selling substantial amounts of oil, the 30 per cent. due in compensation should be collected.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I answered the hon. Gentleman's question. I shall comment on the $1·6 billion-worth of oil that Iraq is entitled to export under UN resolutions to place into the escrow account so that 30 per cent. is available for compensation.

With regard to the availability of funds, as I have said, there is not enough money in the kitty to fund the compensation commission's activities. As the hon. Member for Rhondda said, there is $24 million worth of funds available for the compensation commission, largely from frozen Iraqi assets, as authorised under Security Council resolution 778. Those funds have originated from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United States and from Japan. For the moment, that will be enough to maintain the commission and to get the assessment process off to a good start which is an essential preliminary to payments being made. We expect that more funds will become available in due course via the sequestration route, although how much is not clear.

The hon. Member for Rhondda inquired about the position in Britain, and I wish to comment on the position

[Mr. Lennox-Boyd]

in respect of sequestration in Britain. Under resolution 778, the United Kingdom can take similar action. To give effect to that resolution, an Order in Council was laid before the Privy Council on 12 May. That will come into force on 24 May.

That Order in Council provides powers to identify funds that represent the proceeds of oil sales and to sequestrate those unencumbered by third party claims for transfer into the United Nations escrow account. However, the difficulty is determining whether they are encumbered by third party claims. The Bank of England will have to investigate that and, under the Order in Council, it has power to ask financial institutions to identify funds. Those investigations will take a considerable time and I am afraid that we will not have the results before the end of the year.

With regard to any assets that could be sequestrated in Britain, I should say—and it would be wrong of me not to—that the judgment at the moment, although full investigation will confirm whether this is the case, is that 100 per cent. of the Iraqi assets held in the United Kingdom will be subject to prior claims. With regard to assets in Britain, claimants will have to await the payment of funds by Iraq into the compensation fund as provided under the resolutions.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister's first point filled me with great joy. I was pleased that an Order in Council was finally available, although very late in the day in comparison to the Americans, to allow the sequestration of those funds. However, the Minister then said that there are claims on those funds so the money will not be collected.

If the present $21 million is not sufficient to pay any claims, but is simply money to run the commission, perhaps the Government should consider sequestering that money to pay British nationals under the Foreign Compensation Act 1950 instead of allowing the money to fund a massive commission. As I understand it, representatives of 15 different countries have set up a huge superstructure which is sucking in $21 million. That money is not enough to run the commission and the sequestrated money will not go to claimants such as the constituent of the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill). Instead, it will simply be used to run the machine.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That is not true. The hon. Gentleman is aware that we are dealing for claims for the whole world. Sequestrations from the United States, Japan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are going into the fund for claimants from all over the world.

I want to consider the precise position with British claims in terms of timing. We are about to send our ninth batch of claims to Geneva. Some 2,575 claims will then have been dispatched relating to 1,900 claims. We are in correspondence with another 800 to obtain additional evidence for clarification of various points. Only preliminary processing has been carried out in Geneva as yet and that has not covered all the claims that have been sent.

All the claims are being dealt with in order of receipt and there are huge numbers of them. The process is set in motion and, as I have said, from September and November, the commission will be at work and we hope that, within a few months after that, we will see its determination.

The hon. Member for Rhondda and the world are aware that determination depends on the payment by Iraq in compliance with United Nations resolutions. We must keep the pressure up to bring that payment about. There is no other way in which claims can be met save by Iraq observing the United Nations resolutions so that claimants all over the world—not just in the United Kingdom—can have their claims assessed and then met. We must keep up the pressure to that end.

The Bill is an undoubted asset in pursuing that end. When the Foreign Compensation Act was passed in 1950, it was not expected that there would be a situation in which compensation would have to flow from an international organisation or tribunal. Under the provisions of UN Security Council resolution 687 of 1991, the Security Council set up the United Nations Compensation Commission and fund to receive claims for damage or injury to individuals, Governments or corporations as a result of Iraq's unlawful invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

We hope that in most cases it will be possible for the Government to pass that compensation on directly to British claimants. However, there may be circumstances in which it would be appropriate for the Foreign Compensation Commission to conduct further adjudication of the claims and to distribute compensation between British claimants. The Bill will enable the Foreign Compensation Commission to do just that.

In conclusion, I want to comment specifically on the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Test. He graphically described the distress of Mrs. Major and his sentiments were supported by the hon. Member for Rhondda who also raised the case of poor Mrs. Major who was bereaved as a result of her husband's death from a heart attack while being held hostage.

I am aware of that unfortunate case. It took some time, with the assistance of her husband's former employers, to establish the details of her claim. However, all her claims were sent to Geneva on 20 April. They have reached Geneva and they will be in the process which, as I have said, will take place from September. The criteria have been established for the method of approaching the claims and it is now up to the United Nations Compensation Commission to decide whether to make an award and, if so, how much, in accordance with the procedures that will take place from late summer onwards and in accordance with the procedures that will be adopted for the other cases before the UNCC.

As I have said, the United Kingdom Government have complied fully with all the necessary preliminary work and have sent Mrs. Major's case to Geneva for consideration. On that note, I recommend to the House that the Bill be read a Third time.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third Time, and passed with an amendment.

Rosyth (Nuclear Safety)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

7.18 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I know that, although this debate is taking place at this early hour, and although I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Chamber, the debate is occurring at the very time when I should have been hosting the RAF parliamentary group meeting. You could not attend because you had to be in the Chair, and I am now unable to attend because I have to speak in my Adjournment debate.

I am pleased to have been fortunate enough to be successful in the ballot for this evening's debate. As my right hon. Friend the Minister is aware, I sat through the whole of the Navy debate, but was not fortunate enough to be called. I am indeed lucky tonight and I want to consider the situation of the royal naval dockyard at Rosyth in Fife.

The House will be aware that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), in whose constituency the dockyard is located, cannot be with us this evening. As the House knows, she has been hospitalised and has undergone a serious operation. I am sure that I speak for the whole House when I say that we all wish her a speedy recovery. I know that she would have been present this evening if she had been able to attend. I also know that she would have supported everything that I have to say, because she and I and others have worked hard on what I may call the Rosyth project.

Safety, especially nuclear power, at Rosyth royal naval dockyard is important—I shall have much to say about that later in my remarks. Before doing so, I draw the attention of the House to the importance of the nuclear submarines to the Scottish economy. Vast sums of public money have been spent to create the Trident base at Faslane on the Clyde. That of itself has brought huge economic benefits to Scotland.

Together with the facilities at Coulport, the basing of the submarine flotilla at the Clyde bases has resulted in many permanent civilian posts and the purchasing and renting of a large number of private homes throughout central Scotland by the submarine crews. That means that Scotland enjoys a substantial cash flow as a result of the bases being located on the Clyde in Scotland.

There is a political dimension. A number of local authorities have nuclear-free policies. Many councillors, civic leaders and opinion formers support the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and are opposed to any nuclear facilities at all in Scotland. Indeed, it has been a continuing and difficult political problem, and I shall have more to say on that later.

I was pleased to hear the commitment given by the Government to retain two dockyards because the case for employment at Rosyth and Devonport has been well recorded and well spoken of in the past. The respective bids by each dockyard for the nuclear submarine refits may not now be substantially different. I know that the Ministry of Defence has benefited substantially from the fact that the bases have been in competition, and that has resulted in a substantial reduction in the price tendered to carry out the work.

The political case has been well argued. To that end, I simply say that it will be difficult to sustain the case for having the nuclear submarine bases in the Clyde with the crews having their permanent family homes in central Scotland if Scotland does not get the nuclear submarine refitting contract. I shall refer to that again later.

Today, I will not argue the case for Rosyth in any department on purely economic, employment or political grounds. Instead, I hope to demonstrate that Rosyth is the right dockyard to be awarded the nuclear submarine contract on strategic, cost, planning and—primarily—safety grounds. The Rosyth bid, when it is finally made public, will be seen to be keen and competitive.

What about the nuclear safety and planning problems that will arise at both bases? Because the nearest habitation is further from the nuclear trials berth, the nuclear risks at Rosyth are less for the population. Consequently, the risk to society is much less at Rosyth because far fewer people live close to the site.

The population distribution and topography of the area surrounding the sites are such that, in the event of an accident, evacuation could be accomplished more readily and with less disruption at Rosyth than Devonport. Although I must admit that nuclear accidents are extremely unlikely, the consequences are such that plans for protection of the public in the vicinity of nuclear submarine refitting sites are absolutely essential.

The naval reactor accident contingency planning arrangements now include the automatic counter-measure zone—a radius of 550 m. Within that area, all people who are not essential to the management of the accident are evacuated and supplied with potassium iodate tablets. Automatic actions commence immediately on declaration of an accident—or an accident that may be only a warning but not a real accident. One can understand that that often happens in such situations.

The pre-planned counter-measure zone has a radius of 10 km. A local pre-arranged monitoring scheme is required for that area so that appropriate emergency measures, including evacuation, can be taken in the downwind sector following a severe accident. Potentially, that affects a civilian population that is some two and a half times greater at Devonport than at Rosyth.

At Rosyth, the automatic counter-measure zone does not contain any dwellings and is wholly contained within the base site, while at Devonport the automatic counter-measure zone extends outside the site and includes dwellings. I have some interesting aerial photographs that show that clearly. Being an airman, I have no difficulty getting hold of aerial photographs. The nearest habitation to the nuclear trial berth is substantially further away at Rosyth, making assessed individual risk less for a given radioactive release.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on that point. I realise that he is a champion of his constituents. Does he understand that the contract that we are discussing is to maintain the Trident submarine, not the missile or weapon system itself?

Mr. Walker: It is obvious that my hon. Friend is a new boy. He does not know that, for the past 14 years, it has been my job in Scotland to deal with the peace movement. The one thing I understand is the different parts of submarines, missiles and so on. My hon. Friend will also

[Mr. Walker]

realise that, when one is establishing a refitting base of this sort, it requires local authority approval, and approval from the nuclear bodies responsible. I shall refer to that in a moment.

There is a greater concentration of population close to the Devonport site in the downwind sectors under prevailing wind conditions. This population is part of the city of Plymouth. There would be considerable pressure on available road routes for evacuation. I shall refer to that later. The number of people living within 2 km of the proposed uprated docks at Rosyth is under 2,000, while it is well over 30,000 at Devonport. At Devonport, the automatic counter-measure zone includes civilian residences. At Rosyth, the nearest civilian population is well clear of the zone.

That is the present position, but what about the future? Should further limitations be necessary due to a continuing development of nuclear safety standards—one cannot rule that out—the operational impact is likely to be less at Rosyth than at Devonport. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will agree that continuous improvements of nuclear safety standards is a feature of the United Kingdom nuclear industry, including the nuclear submarine programme. Indeed, we can be proud of our safety record in the United Kingdom in that area.

This can result in requirements to modify safety-related plant or introduce further restrictions in the operations to ensure safety. Examples of both such constraints have been evident in nuclear submarine refitting recently. The possibility of such additional limitations will always exist, expecially for upgraded facilities, whether at Devonport or Rosyth. However, at Roysyth, any such emergent limitations are likely to be less severe because of Rosyth's comparatively remote location.

All that will have to be taken into account in the planning process, which operates as follows. The MOD produces a notice of proposed development, which is submitted to local authorities for approval. If the proposal is rejected by the local authority, the Government can force the application through. However, in practice they never seem to do so.

As with all planning applications, local objections can be raised by private individuals or organisations. The local authorities can then rule on the objections or decide to refer the case to the Secretary of State for Scotland in the case of Rosyth, or to the Department of the Environment in the case of anything in England, such as the Devonport base. The Department of the Environment then decides whether to move to a public inquiry.

The RD57 Trident facility at Rosyth and the recently announced nuclear waste store at Rosyth have both obtained local authority approval for the MOD's notice of proposed developments. So again, Rosyth is much further down the road. That is not surprising, because, way back in the mid-1980s, a decision was taken that Rosyth should be the base at which the nuclear refitting would take place.

I have demonstrated that the safety case for carrying out nuclear submarine refitting at Rosyth is sound. I have also demonstrated that the bids by Devonport and Rosyth are competitive. I understand that the Rosyth bid is the lower of the two, but that the Devonport bid is close. Whether or not that is true, the bids appear to be in the same ball park. Therefore, the political consequences for the south-west of England and for Scotland may be a factor.

It is wise to note that political factors might influence the decision. If that is so, I draw it to the attention of the House that a 5 per cent. swing against the Government would lead to a loss of nine Conservative seats in Scotland. That would leave only two Conservative Members of Parliament north of the border. In the south-west of England, a similar swing would reduce the 16 Conservative seats by about six, leaving 10 Conservative Members of Parliament.

Consequently, adverse political reaction to the failure of Rosyth to obtain the nuclear submarine refitting contract would be much greater in Scotland than in the south-west of England. Even worse, such a failure could put the union between Scotland and England at great risk. It is not realistic to imagine that, with two Conservative Members of Parliament, a Conservative Government could handle the affairs of Scotland easily. That would create huge problems.

The nuclear safety case for Rosyth is also superior. Individual risk at Rosyth is considerably less, because the nearest habitation, as I have said, is much further away at Rosyth than at Devonport, which is situated in the middle of a large city. Rosyth is located in a sparsely populated area.

In addition, the fuel movements at Rosyth are short. That is important. At Devonport there is greater a concentration of population close to the downwind prevailing wind sector. There would be considerable pressure on the road routes of the city of Plymouth if evacuation were required.

At Devonport, nuclear fuel will be transported for 1·25 km. The fuel will pass within 200 m of a public highway and housing. I repeat that there is nothing like that at Rosyth.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport) *rose*——

Mr. Walker: So on nuclear safety, political and cost grounds, Rosyth is the best choice for the refitting work on nuclear submarines. That is probably why my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the President of the Board of Trade, when they were at the Ministry of Defence, and my noble Friend Lord Younger, when he was responsible for defence at the Scottish Office, gave pledges that Rosyth had been selected.

Those pledges were given in the mid-1980s. They were firm pledges at the time. Those pledges, along with the retention of two dockyards, are still relevant today. To refit submarines at Rosyth and surface ships at Devonport is the best cost, political and safety solution.

Mr. Streeter: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, with his kind permission, I might make a two-minute speech when he has finished?

Mr. Walker: I am afraid that I cannot confirm that. The hon. Gentleman should have asked me before the debate. We could then have had a discussion.

If a dock refurbishment proposal is selected, the RD57 facility at Rosyth—what I would describe as the massive hole in the ground—could be used to store the decommissioned nuclear submarines, pending final decisions on their disposal. That is important when one is discussing such matters. If we are to continue to locate

decommissioned submarines at Rosyth before their disposal, we must consider that point. I suggest that that would be acceptable only if Rosyth were awarded the Trident refitting contract.

Rosyth provides a relatively safe lay-up and storage facility for decommissioned submarines. However, if the submarine refitting work did not come to Rosyth, there would be no site nuclear facilities, technical expertise or back-up, and the people of Fife and Scotland would demand the removal of decommissioned nuclear submarines currently stored at Rosyth. They would welcome the shipment of those submarines down to Devonport, if it could win the contract.

Studies carried out by Fife regional council have shown that about 18,000 people in Scotland are dependent on the Rosyth complex. More than 1,000 businesses across Scotland, and in the north and the midlands of England, would be affected if the dockyards were run down. The wider community would suffer extreme dislocation as a result of unemployment, service rundown and housing problems, with the associated local and national Exchequer costs. In all, the dockyard and neighbouring base contribute about £380 million per annum to the Scottish economy.

I understand the strength of feeling in the south-west on the matter. Anyone who has made any attempt to study defence procurement facilities and expenditure understands that. I do not make the case for Rosyth purely on narrow grounds. I make it because I believe that the Government, having made a decision to retain two dockyards—a wise strategic decision—have an obligation as a result of pledges given previously by Ministers.

Unless it can be demonstrated that the Devonport bid far outweighs the Rosyth bid in terms of true costs—if that is so, it will have to be taken into account by all those affected—the decision to locate the submarine refitting in Scotland makes sense, as it did in the mid-1980s, in view of its location far from human habitation and close to the base on the Clyde from which the submarines will operate. It makes no sense to ship the crews up and down the country when their submarines are in for refitting. Their homes will be in Scotland, and it would be nonsense for them constantly to travel the length of the country to Devonport.

It makes sense for Devonport to refit the surface ships, because those crews have their homes in the south and they would not have to travel. All the arguments should be based on the firm pledge that we will retain two dockyards —I welcome that, and I am sure that everyone in Scotland welcomes it. I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say.

7.38 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): As is traditional on such occasions, I begin by warmly congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on his good fortune in the ballot, and on the characteristically skilful and all-embracing way in which he had presented his case. He is a tireless champion of his constituents and of Scotland, and he is fighting his corner on the dockyard issue, as he is fully entitled to do.

I am sorry that the debate has occurred somewhat earlier than expected and so had prevented my hon. Friend from hosting the RAF reception downstairs, but I know that he will soon be able to follow his other great interest in defence, and join his fellow pilots. However, I am afraid that I cannot say anything tonight that will lead to a celebration; I shall simply be able to set forward the case and give some of the answers to the questions that he has posed in our useful debate.

I join my hon. Friend in sending a message to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire), as I have just heard that she is having a serious operation. Certainly, hon. Members from both sides of the House wish her a speedy recovery. She has been a great contributor to debates on the dockyards; I think that the last time that I was at the Dispatch Box for an Adjournment debate, I was answering her well-deployed arguments. I know that we all hope that she will soon return to her place here.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend when he began by welcoming our commitment to keep two dockyards open —a fact which should perhaps have taken some of the sting out of then dockyard debate. However, I realise from some of the atmospherics bubbling around me tonight that there is still a great deal of passion.

Lady Eden, the wife of Sir Anthony Eden, once said that she felt that the Suez canal had been running through her drawing room at No. 10 Downing street. In my much humbler political role, there have been times during the past few months when I have felt that a dockyard has already been built in my office in the Ministry of Defence.

A great deal of material in the debate is constantly being covered and re-covered in our arguments, but my hon. Friend has done the House a service tonight by raising the nuclear safety issues. I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to some of them, and I hope that I shall set many of my hon. Friend's fears to rest.

I shall first place the debate in context by saying that I and all my Government colleagues are deeply conscious of the great importance of the royal dockyards, at both Devonport and Rosyth, to the economies of their areas. My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about the economic importance of the decision to his constituents in the region of Scotland. I can confirm that we have studied carefully the reports produced by Fife regional council last November and last month on the impact of the possible closure of Rosyth dockyard and naval base.

The closure of the dockyard and naval base are not being contemplated, but we have noted the forecasts that have been made, and we welcome the reports, which are a useful contribution to our consideration of the local economic impact of any proposal we make. We have received similar reports from the Devonport region.

The economic impact of the decision is important to both dockyards which each directly employ several thousand people and sustain employment for thousands more in companies across their regions. To their great credit, the companies are among the largest trainers of apprentices in their areas.

Therefore, we fully recognise the great significance for Fife and for Scotland of the issues which have been raised today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) are present, I must ensure that I am even-handed by emphasising in almost every paragraph that the same applies to the Devonport and west country region.

In the ecumenical atmosphere that is prevailing at present, I pay tribute to the work forces of both dockyards

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

for the long and devoted service that they have given over many years. We have good reason to be grateful to all who serve there.

I shall remind the House of the background to our decision-making process. There are two issues which the Government have to resolve—first, where to invest in the expensive facilities which we will need for refitting Trident and other nuclear-powered submarines by the turn of the century; secondly, how to secure the best value for money in the refitting programme as a whole in the long term.

I have to stress to the House that a failure to achieve best value for money in support activities such as refitting must inevitably increase the pressure on the resources that can be found for the front line. The inevitable result of that would be further reductions in the front line: the teeth a little blunter, the tail dragging a little more heavily. My hon. Friend mentioned that he sat through the Navy debate on 6 May, so he will know the importance of the point that I am making.

At present, nuclear-powered submarines are refitted, refuelled and decommissioned at both Devonport and Rosyth. Both yards have an excellent record in technical and safety terms in that work. As the House will be aware, the reductions in the armed forces announced in July 1990 mean that there will in future be significantly fewer nuclear-powered submarines in the fleet than had at one time been planned. That reduction, from more than 20 to 16, has opened up the possibility that all refitting work could be carried out at one site.

A comprehensive study by the Ministry of Defence, which drew on a wide range of expertise in nuclear construction matters—including the companies which manage the yards on the Government's behalf—has shown that it would be feasible, safe and cost-effective to concentrate nuclear work at either Devonport or Rosyth, as opposed to continuing with the previous plans to maintain two nuclear refitting yards. There are no strategic reasons to keep two nuclear dockyards, and we have therefore concluded that we should in future concentrate nuclear work at one site.

Mr. Streeter: My hon Friend mentioned safety. Can be confirm that the nuclear installations inspectorate has given both Rosyth and Devonport a clean bill of health on the safety aspects of the proposed installations? My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) spoke about local authority planning permission. Can the Minister confirm that the members of Plymouth city council were unanimous in their decision to grant planning permission for the nuclear waste store at Devonport, and in wishing the contract to come to Plymouth?

Mr. Aitken: I am glad that my hon. Friend has been able to have his say. I shall say something about the nuclear safety issues and the NII's role later, so perhaps my hon. Friend will be patient. In broad terms, I can confirm what he has said, and I am grateful to him for mentioning the unanimity of Plymouth city council on the subject.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced on 9 February that we would be concentrating nuclear work at one dockyard, but that further work was needed to determine which dockyard that should be, and that remains the position. I am sure that the House will agree with me that it is vital to get the answers right. The issues are of great complexity, and, as I told the House during the Navy debate on 6 May, we are continuing to receive information, and much lobbying, from the dockyard operators which we must take into account in formulating our proposals.

My hon. Friend's debate has concentrated on nuclear safety, and I know that he and the House will want to know that the Ministry of Defence attaches very high importance to nuclear safety, and is committed to meeting or exceeding civil standards of nuclear safety for comparable activities. It is a complex and multi-faceted area, and it may help the House if I explain briefly the general approach to it as it relates to the royal dockyards.

The royal dockyards attain high standards of nuclear safety. Their attainment of those standards is checked both by the Ministry of Defence and by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate—NII—which also licences the dockyard operators. It regulates all on-site activities and allows an operation to proceed only when its safety has been adequately demonstrated.

Ministers are also advised on such matters by the nuclear-powered warships safety committee, an independent organisation whose members have a broad spectrum of knowledge relating to nuclear power and are drawn from both Government and civil organisations. Its advice to me has been that public safety is not prejudiced by day-to-day operations, and that, even in the highly unlikely event of a nuclear accident, the general public would be protected by a range of countermeasures.

The royal dockyards, in common with all nuclear operators, work to the ALARP—as low as reasonably practicable—principle, and there are continuing efforts in both dockyards to reduce the exposure incurred by workers. That subject was extensively covered by the report of the Select Committee on Defence on radiological protection of service and civilian personnel published in late 1990.

The Ministry of Defence requires a site safety justification consisting of a series of nuclear safety reports to be produced by each dockyard. Those reports must cover all organisations, special controls, facilities and services whose satisfactory operation is necessary to ensure nuclear safety. Following satisfactory assessment of draft reports, the Ministry of Defence grants approval for the facilities to be used.

A crucial part of nuclear safety is concerned with the prevention of untoward incidents by equipment, facility or manpower failures. Safety standards for equipment and facilities are also extremely high. As my hon. Friend knows, safety is of key importance in the design of the new facilities that will be needed at either royal dockyard for Trident refitting. The designs and construction of the facilities will be subject to detailed approval at every stage by the nuclear installations inspectorate and the Ministry of Defence.

There is a set process for this, involving the provision of an early overall safety report, followed by more detailed reports concerning design, construction and future operation. These reports are compiled by professional engineers, and are by no means slim volumes. In fact, the more detailed reports would comprise several large tomes.

After this initial compilation, the reports must be reviewed by another group of professional engineers who have no links with the first, before being put forward to site

safety committees who review the logic and content of the reports before they go forward to the NII and my Department.

I can assure my hon. Friend that neither my Department nor the NII will give approval to anything that does not give proper protection to dockyard employees, service and other MOD personnel and the general public. Equally, the NII is fully involved in approving facilities and arrangements for storing nuclear waste and used fuel within the dockyards.

The provision of new nuclear waste storage facilities to the latest safety standards is at present being taken forward at each dockyard under the oversight of MOD safety authorities and with the support and backing of the respective local authorities—a point that was brought out by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton. I am glad to be able to confirm that the local authorities in Plymouth are just as highly supportive of DML's proposals for concentrating nuclear refitting at Devonport.

While I am mentioning local authorities, I should also point out that the local authorities in Plymouth are as highly supportive of DML's proposals for concentrating nuclear refitting at Devonport as my hon. Friend is of BTL's proposals to do the same at Rosyth.

My Department's experts on nuclear reactor and radiation safety, together with experts from other parts of the Ministry, conduct regular and detailed safety audits of naval bases and both dockyards. The audits consistently find that a strong nuclear safety culture exists and that there is a commendable and determined commitment to radiation dose reduction at both dockyards.

While we are confident that our procedures, equipment and facilities are safe, we have to prepare for the remote contingency of an accident occurring to a reactor while in a dockyard. My Department has a nuclear accident response organisation which conducts excercises at all MOD nuclear sites, ranging from paper exercises involving small teams to full-scale exercises involving large sections of the work force, local management, naval and civil authorities and national response forces. These exercises test procedures at both royal dockyards. I can assure my hon. Friend that we believe that plans and procedures at both would protect the public in the very unlikely circumstances of a reactor accident.

We are therefore confident, based on our understanding of the safety assessment principles applied by the independent nuclear installation inspectorate, that any of the proposals will be able to meet the NII's requirements.

My hon. Friend asked a particular question about the operational impact of a further tightening of nuclear safety standards. I can confirm to him that we and the dockyard contractors are working to the latest NII safety assessment principles, which were issued only last year. We are confident that all the proposals can meet the NII standards prevailing at the time that approval is sought. If standards are tightened later, they would not apply retrospectively, unless there were a change of use.

In the course of informal discussions, the NII has given no indication that it believes that any of the proposals from either dockyard will be unable to meet its requirements. What the NII have not done, nor will it finally do so until the facilities are ready for operation, is guarantee approval for either proposal. So it would not be correct to say that a clean bill of health has been given, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton has indicated. But I believe that I have made the position perfectly clear.

The dockyard contractors' proposals take full account of the need to seek NII approval for each stage of the design and construction process, and have allowed adequate time for the NII to conduct a proper approval process.

I must emphasise that both dockyards have conducted nuclear refitting for many years with excellent safety records. To carry out all nuclear refitting in one place entails no increase in risks to safety, and the same stringent criteria, which are independent of the population density in the vicinity, will apply at whichever dockyard is chosen for the work.

My hon. Friend raised the question of nuclear accident contingency plans. Such plans are developed at each port or naval base used by nuclear-powered warships. These contain comprehensive plans for protecting the public and are drawn up in conjunction with relevant local authorities. Public safety plans set out the automatic measures which would be applied following a nuclear accident.

Because of the small size of the naval nuclear plant and the multiple safety arrangements and containment barriers, automatic counter-measures are confined to a 550-m radius around the submarine. For all but the most severe and extremely unlikely accidents, there would be no need for any counter-measures outside this area. However, as a prudent precaution, we plan with local authorities that contingency arrangements should be sufficiently flexible to allow the extension of counter-measures beyond the automatic zone, but only if required by a very severe accident of the kind that we do not believe is remotely likely to happen.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the Minister for giving way, and I am grateful that he is answering this debate tonight. will he agree with me that, if there were 10 people living near this plant, whether it is in Rosyth or Devonport, the same sort of safety measures would have to be in place as if there were 1,000 or 100,000?

I am sure that he will be answering these points in a moment, but will he also answer a point made by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)? Although, like the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), I am a new Member, I can recognise half-truth and muddle in this instance. Will he also answer the point that the Minister will not be making the decision on the basis of the number of Tory seats that may be at risk?

Mr. Aitken: I am certainly glad to confirm, on the last point, that, although I listened to my hon. Friend's psephological predictions of what a 5 per cent. swing might do to either the west country or Scotland, I have no way of knowing whether his calculations are correct. Whatever the hon. Member may be saying, he is perfectly entitled to voice his opinions in the House, and we listen to them carefully, and I can confirm that these political factors are not part of the Government's decision. We are making our decision on the basis of the criteria that I have announced.

While I will not deny that obviously more members of the public do dwell closer to the nuclear site at Devonport than to that at Rosyth, the key point is that we have worked with local authorities to produce a plan that would protect them at either site.

I conclude by saying once again that the Government are fully aware of the importance of the future of Rosyth

[Mr. Aitken]

dockyard to the people and economy of Fife and of Scotland as a whole, just as they are aware of the importance of Devonport dockyard to the west country. I emphasise that the most stringent standards of nuclear safety are a sine qua non for any yard where nuclear refitting is to take place.

These factors are among the many that we shall consider as we seek to balance the needs of the Royal Navy and the taxpayer against the needs of south-west England and eastern Scotland, and against the more general needs of the defence of the United Kingdom and the cost-effective use of public funds.

I can assure my hon. Friend, and all hon. Members who have taken part in this debate, that all the proposals are being assessed exhaustively and entirely even-handedly against the same criteria. Clearly, the proposals differ in detail, but our aim is to reach a position in which a like-for-like comparison is possible.

This has involved much discussion with the two dockyard companies, and detailed evaluation by my Department and its external advisers. Our aim is to ensure that they understand our requirements and how we are assessing their proposals, and that we understand precisely what the companies are offering us and what their terms and conditions are.

These are very complicated issues and many factors have to be taken into account. The amount of work involved has been very substantial. In addition, the companies continue to make representations to us by one means or another, and there are also representations by hon. Members. We must, of course, take account of the points made and of the new information supplied. None of this speeds up the decision-making process, and I regret that it has been longer than I had hoped or have indicated to the House earlier.

At the end of the day, our aim will be to make a sound comparison of the various proposals and to be able to show all concerned that we have made the comparison fairly and even-handedly. Once we have proposals to make, we shall announce them, and will then be able to discuss their wider ramifications with all interested parties. That consultation process will be immensely important in ensuring that we reach the right conclusions in the end.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North for the fact that we have had this debate today and that I have had the opportunity to discuss some of the issues that will lie behind the ultimate decision.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 19 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Electricity Generation

1. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the Director General of Electricity Supply to discuss the regulation of electricity generation.

The Minister for Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I meet the Director General of Electricity Supply from time to time and discuss a wide range of electricity issues.

Mr. Cummings: As electricity prices have risen by 9 per cent. in the past month, while British Coal prices have fallen by 19 per cent., does the Minister agree that the generators are failing abysmally to pass those benefits on to the consumer? Does he also agree that the cost of coal-fired electricity is considerably lower than gas-fired generation? If he does agree, why does he continue to shut pits, while promoting the building of new gas power stations?

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the coal review White Paper, which I am sure he has read, which examines all those arguments in detail, as they were examined by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. The hon. Gentleman should have set the record straight and pointed out that electricity prices to the domestic consumer have fallen in nominal terms and have certainly fallen in real terms in almost every area.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Given that the forecast of the National Grid is that there will be 57 per cent. over-capacity by 1997-98, do the Government make it clear to the electricity supply industry that its priority should be conservation rather than production, and if not, why not?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman should study the National Grid statement in rather more detail. It sets out a number of scenarios making different assumptions on a seven-year horizon. The Government are, of course, concerned to promote energy conservation. That is why the budget of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in this area has almost doubled.

Mr. Robin Cook: Does the Minister recall that, in March, the House was told that the Government had saved 12 pits by coming up with a subsidy to enable the generators to burn more coal? Is he aware that, in the two months since then, far from burning more coal, the generators have been burning even less than they had planned? Will he meet the generators and ask them when they intend to place a contract for a single extra bag of coal? If he does not get that contract, does he appreciate that those 12 pits will go the way of the rest? If that happens, his subsidy will look like a sham which solved a political crisis for the Conservative party but has not solved the jobs crisis in the coal industry.

Mr. Eggar: That is absolutely typical of the hon. Gentleman: when he identifies a problem, he wants the Government to get in and sort it out. He believes in state direction. He has no belief whatever in the private sector and wants to spend taxpayers' money regardless of the value to the economy as a whole. The Government have made it absolutely clear that we will make a subsidy available, but that it is a matter for negotiation between British Coal and the private sector generators to see whether additional coal sales can be identified.

Exporters

2. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department has taken to increase the competitiveness of British exporters.

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Needham): The Government give a high priority to helping British exporters. United Kingdom companies are now in a better position than ever to win business overseas.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the competitiveness of our exchange rate has helped to constrain inflation and that we need to keep bearing down on domestic costs to keep inflation under control? Those economic measures introduced by our Government are more effective than the gloom and carping by the Opposition about the performance of our manufacturing industry and exports.

Hon. Members: Rubbish.

Mr. Needham: Despite Opposition Members' cries of "Rubbish" from a sedentary position, since 1981 the volume of British manufactured exports has grown faster than that of France, Germany, Italy, the United States or Japan. During the past three years, manufactured exports have risen by four times as much as imports, and since 1989 our exports of manufactures are up 16 per cent. Instead of doom, doom, gloom and gloom, which is all that we get from Opposition Members, that is the real history behind British manufacturing exports.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: In view of the enormous role that the steel industry plays in United Kingdom exports, is the Secretary of State aware of the serious potential threat posed to the British steel industry by the closure of Ucar Carbon, the only plant in Britain that manufactures graphite electrodes, which are part of the electric arc smelting process in special steel manufacture? It is the only United Kingdom plant, and it is scheduled for closure. What can the Secretary of State and his Ministers do, along with Opposition Members, to prevent that closure?

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Lady knows, that is a matter for my right hon. Friend. I believe that she is in discussion with him on that issue, and I am sure that he will work as hard as he can with her to ensure that whatever action

might be taken will be taken. However, with regard to trade generally, as the hon. Lady says, British Steel's performance is unrivalled, and it is unrivalled and competing in markets all over the world because it has been privatised.

Mr. Butcher: Does my hon. Friend agree that, when it comes to manufactured exports, what distinguishes manufacturers from the service sector is that manufacturing is more capital intensive? Does he further agree that there may be a danger that our progress in recovering from recession may be affected by a shortfall of capital in the small firms manufacturing sector? Will he, therefore, as the champion on this cause with the Treasury, urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to consider, within the lifetime of this Parliament, the abolition of capital taxation, which will work wonders for inward investment and give us a clear competive edge within Europe and in the broader world market?

Mr. Needham: I shall pass on my hon. Friend's views to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. As he knows, the Budget contained major measures, such as the loan guarantee scheme, for assisting small companies, and the Government are determined to do all they can to help small companies, not least in exports.

Mr. Robin Cook: As the Minister has been so free in lecturing the Opposition for talking doom and gloom, will he take the opportunity to rebuke the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who, in his Budget statement, forecast that the manufacturing deficit will double this year? Did he get it wrong, or is he also peddling doom and gloom? Will the Minister confirm that, in every year until 1982, we had a surplus in manufactured trade, and that in every year since 1982, we have had a deficit in manufactured trade? If, after 14 years, the hon. Gentleman really believes that the Government now have the right policies for industry, can he say in which year we shall return to the manufactured trade surplus that we used to have in every year until the Conservative party was elected?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that such forecasts from anybody are totally meaningless, and he would never make such a forecast himself. The figures I gave for manufacturing exports are true. They are not figures that he has ever used and he would never use them because, as far as he is concerned, they do not paint the true picture of British manufacturing —which is one of tremendous success. The Government do have a policy on exports and manufacturing exports. We have a policy to do everything that we can, with manufacturers and business, to promote our exports. That is very different from the hon. Gentleman's policy, which is to join the social chapter and to push up costs and push up the incentives for people to leave this country.

Mobile Phones

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals his Department has to change the law to prevent the fraudulent re-chipping of mobile phones.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am not persuaded that a change in the law is necessary.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I declare an interest as an adviser to the Telecommunication Manufacturers Association and as an owner of one of those terrible machines that are likely to be stolen. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows of the growing prevalence of telephones being stolen and adapted for fraudulent use, which has come to the attention of not only the industry and users but even the House authorities, because a large number of telephones have been stolen from this place. Will my hon. Friend meet a delegation from the industry and of others concerned, and think again about improving the law to stop the fraudulent changing of mobile phones?

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge of that subject, and I should be happy to meet a delegation led by him. Our legal advice is that there are adequate powers available under the Theft Act 1978 to prosecute, and further powers available under section 42 of the Telecommunications Act 1987. We are not convinced that further legislation is necessary in this instance.

Travel Operators (Funds)

4. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he is taking to ensure that travel agents and tour operators have sufficient funds to protect holidaymakers in the event of financial collapse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Tour operators and travel agents who sell packages are required under the Package Travel Regulations 1992 to have security for the refund of customers' prepayments and for repatriation in the event of insolvency. It is their responsibility to ensure that they have sufficient funds to provide that security.

Dr. Godman: Is it not the case, if we can hear the truth, that the Minister has implemented an Arthur Daley-type charter for unscrupulous tour operators? What will he do this summer, when the first unbonded tour operator collapses, to repatriate stranded holidaymakers abroad who have no financial protection? Should we not all be urging our constituents to stick to dealing with firms in membership of the Association of British Travel Agents?

Mr. Leigh: For the first time under the directive, holidaymakers who deal with a package tour operator will have the reassurance that their deposit will be protected under an insurance, bonding or trust scheme. The Opposition proposed that we should institute an immensely bureaucratic licensing system, which would add enormously to consumer costs and to business regulation. That is why we rejected that licensing system, and we consider that our proposal gives sufficient consumer protection.

Mr. Page: I support my hon. Friend's remark that bonding and insurance will give greater protection to holidaymakers than ever before, reinforced by criminal sanctions if bonding and insurance do not take place. Does my hon. Friend accept that efforts by the five trade bodies to form an umbrella organisation, the Travel Protection Association, will give even more protection to holidaymakers wishing to travel under the auspices of those five organisations?

Mr. Leigh: I have heard of that scheme, which is much in the spirit of the directive. It is based on a flexible approach, the industry regulating itself, and ensuring customer protection without enormous costs and bureaucratic burdens being placed on the industry. That is precisely the approach that the Department favours.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Minister says that a licensing scheme would be excessively burdensome and bureaucratic. Why is it that, before the last election, he issued a press statement saying that he would introduce licensing? Does the Minister realise that his regulations fail to implement fully article 7 of the package travel directive? What will he do to ensure that holidaymakers stranded abroad by travel companies that collapse are brought home at no extra cost?

Mr. Leigh: When we launched a consultation exercise, we found that if we were to introduce a licensing system, literally tens of thousands of operators would be covered by it. We would be tying them up in a tangle of red tape. One cannot legislate against fraud. We would only have ensured that business would be over-regulated and that the consumer would have to pay a lot more for his holiday. We have ensured that, when a deposit is paid to a travel package company, that deposit is protected by bonding, insurance or a trust scheme. That is a flexible approach, behind which the whole House can unite.

Teesside Industry

5. **Mr. Bates:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he held on his last visit to Teesside in relation to measures to be taken to encourage manufacturing industry and exports.

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I last went to Teesside on 29 April. I visited the Greentyre company, held discussions with local business men and gave the toast to commerce and industry at the Teesside chamber's annual dinner.

Mr. Bates: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his answer. If he has had an opportunity to read the latest "Business Survey North", which is a survey of 1,000 businesses carried out by the Northern Development Company and the chambers of commerce, he will have noted that it clearly points out that 61 per cent. of manufacturing firms on Teesside have experienced an increase in export orders in the past three months and that it goes on to conclude that export orders on Teesside in manufacturing industry are now at a record level. Does my right hon. Friend agree that these facts are a clear vindication of this Government's economic and industrial policies and an equally clear demonstration of the dynamism of manufacturing industry on Teesside?

Mr. Heseltine: By one of those curious coincidences, I have seen the figures to which my hon. Friend draws my attention. They give grounds for precisely the optimism to which he refers. In the fourth quarter of 1992, manufactured exports, excluding erratics, were at a record level. Output in the three months to March was 2 per cent. higher than it was a year ago, and a quarter higher than in 1981.

Mr. Mandelson: At the same time as the right hon. Gentleman was holding his welcome discussions on Teesside, was he aware that his Department was preparing to desert the interests of a key manufacturing company, Steetley Magnesia Products Ltd. of Hartlepool? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, at a meeting today in Brussels, his Department is, I am told, withholding its support from vital anti-dumping measures that are needed to cope with unfair competition from China? Will he undertake today to reconsider the Government's position on this issue before Steetley Magnesia Products Ltd. and the future of this vital industry are placed in serious jeopardy?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises an important question. I can assure him that we are looking at this case, as we look at all allegations of dumping, extremely clearly and carefully, but the House must realise that there are just too many examples of companies that lose orders and immediately suggest that they did so for unfair reasons. Our overall national interest is to preserve openness of trade and not to become involved in recriminations. However, I shall certainly look at the hon. Gentleman's case.

Mr. Batiste: The Government have said repeatedly that they are seeking to help British industry by negotiating with our European partners to bring to an end the Arab boycott. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that remains the Government's intention, and can he say whether——

Madam Speaker: Order. The question refers to Teesside. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will relate his question to Teesside.

Mr. Batiste: My right hon. Friend will be aware that industry in Teesside is seriously affected by the impact of the Arab boycott on Israel. Can he say whether any progress was made over raising that boycott in the recent negotiations between European Community Ministers and the Gulf Co-operation Council?

Mr. Heseltine: To the best of my knowledge, this matter was not raised at the recent meeting, but my hon. Friend has our sympathy. He will be aware, though, that there is not a mind to introduce legislation to deal with these matters. I think that that has the overwhelming support of the people who have an interest in those matters.

Textile Regions

6. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications have been received by his Department for use of the European Community Retex funds for development of textile regions; and when the result of these applications will be announced.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): Sixty-seven applications have been received. The projects will be selected by the Retex programme monitoring committee after the programme has finally been approved by the Commission. The results will be announced shortly thereafter.

Mr. Prentice: I thank the Minister for his reply, but can he tell the House why the British Government insist on the submission of 12-month schemes, whereas elsewhere in Europe five-year rolling schemes are the order of the day?

Can he assure the House that there will be no foot-dragging by the Department of Trade and Industry, which would imperil the bids from my own area, submitted by Lancashire Enterprises on behalf of the six north-east Lancashire district councils, which come to £750,000 and which would help 200 struggling firms in this area?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, at the Edinburgh Council, the United Kingdom was not alone in expressing serious reservations about the benefits of these Commission schemes, which merely draw funds away from the general structural programmes. We do not know at this stage whether there will be another Retex scheme. The Edinburgh Council suggested that these schemes should concentrate on cross-border activities, but I do not think that Retex would naturally feature as such an activity. There is no foot-dragging by my Department. If there is a delay, it is because of the great length of time taken by the Commission—it took more than four months to respond to our proposals.

Mr. Dickens: Has my right hon. Friend stressed to the Commission the importance of Retex money for the regeneration of textile areas and the importance of an early decision? When does he expect the decision? Let us have no beating about the bush—are we talking about July, August or September? People need to know because it is a matter of job creation.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to say that, if anyone is beating about the bush, it is up to us to try to get answers from the Commission. So far, the Commission has not approved proposals from any Community country. It took four months to respond to our proposals, and we are still negotiating a final agreement. As soon as we have that agreement, a programme committee can be constituted. There will be no delay from my Department.

Mr. Purchase: It is no use the Minister claiming that he is not dragging his feet. Is he aware that 1,000 redundancies were declared every month in the textile industry last year? That is a tragedy for British industry. The Minister seems to be bobbing when he should be getting weaving.

Mr. Sainsbury: I note the web and the weft of the hon. Gentleman's question. I draw his attention to one of the serious drawbacks of the Retex scheme, which is one of the reasons why the United Kingdom, in common with a majority of European Community states, voted against it. Only European Commission areas in objective 2 and 5b are eligible for help under the Retex scheme. Many of the parts of Britain that have the largest concentration of textile employees are outside those areas. The scheme is meant to help textiles, but can do so only in certain areas, and perhaps not the most important.

Mr. Tredinnick: Now that so many companies in Hinckley in my constituency have taken steps to improve their competitiveness, has my right hon. Friend any initiatives, that in addition to the Retex scheme, could further assist the reconstruction of the industry? Can he say anything about the potential for the hosiery and knitwear industry of a successful GATT round?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to the great strides that the textile industry has made in improving its productivity, which is vital if it is to retain its competitiveness in a very competitive market and if it is to build on its achievements in exporting about £5 billion-worth of textiles last year.

The textile industry, like all other industries, is, of course, eligible for help under the whole range of my Department's schemes. Many of them are especially structured to help smaller businesses of which there are many in the textile industry. I entirely agree that a satisfactory outcome to the Uruguay round of GATT, which would lower tariff peaks, especially in one or two of our most important export markets, would be very helpful to the industry.

Mr. Fatchett: Does not the Minister understand the importance and relevance of the Retex scheme to an industry that has lost 400,000 jobs in the past 10 years? Has he not let the cat out of the bag by making it abundantly clear in previous answers that the Government are opposed to the Retex scheme and to helping those in the textile industry who have lost their jobs? Is he not asking the House to believe in a myth when he says that he as Minister will go to Brussels to rattle the cage of the European Commission? Are not we in fact dealing with an insensitive, indifferent and inefficient Minister, who will not be able to apply pressure in Brussels?

Mr. Sainsbury: I do not know how the hon. Gentleman thinks that he is furthering the cause of the textile industry by what he says, but perhaps he should be reminded of what I just said to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase). The Retex scheme can help the textile industry only in areas that fall within the objective 2 and 5b map, which excludes many areas in Britain with a high concentration of textile employees. The funds for the Retex scheme are drawn from the general structural funds of the Community; they are not under the control of the Council of Ministers. It is a bureaucratic scheme, under the control of the Commission, it is costly and I do not think that it is very effective. That is the view of most EC countries.

EC Insurance Accounts Directive

7. **Mr. French:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the implementation of the EC insurance accounts directive; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I have received a number of comments from a range of interested parties in response to a consultative document that I issued in June 1992. My officials have been in informal contact with a number of such parties. I expect to publish draft regulations for comment next month.

Mr. French: Does my hon. Friend agree that although the directive is, broadly, a step in the right direction in terms of establishing proper comparability between insurance company accounts in this country and those in other European countries, it will work only if carried out on a consistent basis? Will he, therefore, explain why the Government seem inclined to go beyond the directive on the disclosure of distributable profits, when the only certain consequence of that would be that British insurance companies could be put at a disadvantage in takeovers?

Mr. Hamilton: It is not our intention to go further than European directives require of us unless we can justify such extensions. The consultation has hardly started yet, so my hon. Friend is a little premature in assuming that we have come to any final conclusions. I shall certainly bear what he says strongly in mind.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that for British insurers to reap the full benefits of the single market which flow from the proposals that he has put forward for consultation, we need to resolve the problem of the long shadow of Maxwell, which affects the credibility of British insurers in the European single market? What steps will he take to ensure that that matter is finally resolved before his regulations are in place?

Mr. Hamilton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that has little relevance to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French). Of course, we do not countenance fraud in any way, but we have to be realistic. As my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology said in answer to the question about travel companies, we cannot pass laws that will make fraud impossible; we can only make fraud more difficult. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is a policy of the highest importance, to which the Government are firmly committed.

Car Exports

8. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cars are currently being exported each month from the United Kingdom; and what is the total value of the automotive industry to the United Kingdom economy.

Mr. Sainsbury: The automotive industry is an important part of the United Kingdom's manufacturing industry. So far this year, production for export is up by 7·31 per cent. on the same period last year.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that success has been brought about by record inward investment, encouraged by low taxation, low interest rates and low inflation? Is he aware that because of unprecedented economic success under successive Governments, it is now impossible to park one's car in the House of Commons car park, as the lot opposite, who used to come here on bikes, now come here in cars?

Mr. Sainsbury: How welcome it is to hear praise for the achievements of any part of British industry and what a contrast it is with what we hear from the moaning minnies in the Opposition. How graphically my hon. Friend illustrated the success of the Government's economic policies; I congratulate him on that.

Mr. Eastham: Would not it be timely if the Minister were to congratulate some of the engineers who made those successful export figures possible? Is not it worth reminding him that Japanese investment in Britain has shown that Japanese management can manage the automobile industry far better than traditional British management and that the Japanese have invested in the industry, which traditional British management never did?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that, these days, when anyone on either side of the House congratulates British industry on an achievement—the automotive industry certainly deserves congratulation on the transformation that it has achieved—we are congratulating not the work force or the management as separate entities, but the whole of British industry working together, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he visited the car factories of today.

Mr. Streeter: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Ford Motor Company on its outstanding success in recently being awarded the Queen's award for export?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the Ford Motor Company. I would only add my congratulations to all sections of the automotive industry, including—let us not forget—the many component companies which are steadily increasing their exports to Europe.

Mr. Cousins: The whole House will want to congratulate the teams of car manufacturers and car manufacturing work forces, including that coming on stream in the great county of Derbyshire, which we still have with us. Does the Minister recognise that our car exporters have now fought their way back to their position of two years ago? Our balance of payment deficit on cars was more than £2 billion last year. Does the Minister expect the balance of payments deficit to be £2 billion or less this year?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that we will all look forward to a steady increase in the proportion of cars sold in Britain that are produced in Britain, whether they are produced by Japanese-owned companies, American-owned companies, French-owned companies or British-owned companies. The export success is put in perspective if one bears in mind the fact that the first-quarter exports this year were nearly three times the level of the first-quarter exports of five years ago.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I pay tribute to the role of the motor industry in our economy, as my right hon. Friend has done, but can he say when we will reduce our growing deficit in manufactured goods?

Mr. Sainsbury: One way of reducing that deficit to which I draw the attention of my hon. Friend is by encouraging inward investors to come here and produce manufactured goods, as the Japanese car companies are doing effectively. Of course, if we are to retain our attraction as a location for inward investors, we must be seen to remain a central part of the European Community and must also avoid saddling our manufacturers with the social chapter.

Energy Projects (Merseyside)

9. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the development of energy projects in Liverpool bay and the River Mersey.

Mr. Eggar: Progress is a matter for the private sector, but we shall keep in close touch with developments on these projects.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister accept that the development of the oil and gas fields in Liverpool bay could mark a crucial and significant turn in the economies of both Merseyside and Deeside? When is his Department likely to give final approval for the development of the gas

fields and what active role is it playing to try to ensure that the construction of the rigs necessary for the exploration and exploitation of the field is carried out at the Cammell Laird yard on Merseyside, where there is a desperate need for employment opportunities? Where would be a more fitting place than Merseyside for the construction of those facilities?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that during the coal review my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave permission under section 36 for Connah's Quay to proceed. That in turn will have a significant impact on the economic viability of the find in Liverpool bay. It was quite remarkable that, although certain sections of the Liberal party gave their support, not a single voice was raised by the Liverpool Labour party in favour of proceeding with that project during the whole consultation process leading up to the coal review White Paper. It is recognised that the project would have led to at least 5,000 construction jobs. The Labour party should balance the energy demands of this country.

Mr. Richards: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is only because of the Government's energy policy that Liverpool bay will be developed and that, if the Labour party had had its way, we would still be producing coal that no one wants?

Mr. Eggar: I agree with my hon. Friend and I pay tribute to the Welsh TUC which, at the last minute, made its position absolutely clear: it wanted the Liverpool bay development to go ahead.

Mr. George Howarth: In the light of his previous answer, will the Minister confirm that I wrote a letter to his right hon. Friend which bore the signature of every Labour Member on Merseyside and also the signatures of Liberal and Conservative Members urging him to go ahead precisely along the lines that he did during the period of the coal review? Will the Minister now apologise for this earlier statement? While he is on the subject, will he pull together Hamilton Oil, the Department and Cammell Laird and work out precisely what can be done to bring the orders for the oil drilling platforms to Cammell Laird—or is he prepared to see another Swan Hunter on Merseyside?

Mr. Eggar *rose*——

Hon. Members: Withdraw!

Mr. Eggar: I should certainly be willing to apologise to the hon. Gentleman if the letter makes it quite clear that those hon. Members were willing to see the closure of mines as a result—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Yes, but that is just the point. Opposition Members are not prepared to make hard and difficult choices. That is why they are in opposition and why they will remain in opposition.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister agree that the Labour party in Merseyside has supported both proposals because it considers it necessary to have a balanced energy policy? That is why we also believe that the petroleum revenue tax changes may prejudice the prospect of any other inshore projects of the kind envisaged in the question. The Minister is misleading the House and the country when he suggests that this narrow and blinkered view of energy policy, if that is what it amounts to, can produce anything like the share that the country requires between oil, gas and coal—resources which the country already owns.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman is now on record as being against any restriction on the production of coal, being in favour of nuclear production and being in favour of the expansion of gas-fired electricity production. That is highly responsible from the Opposition Front Bench that seeks to form the Government of this country. I suggest that he makes those on the Benches behind him aware that it is necessary to make difficult choices. It is no good his coming to the Dispatch Box to ask for every single thing to proceed in order to persuade and make happy different sectors of his own party.

Manufacturing Industry (East Midlands)

10. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he will next visit the east midlands to discuss job losses in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Heseltine: I hope to visit the east midlands shortly. I expect to discuss a range of issues with manufacturing and other businesses in the region.

Mr. Barnes: The Secretary of State certainly needs to talk to a great number of people in the east midlands. In the shire county elections in the east midlands, Labour took 211 seats to the Conservatives' 134. We need investment in manufacturing industry in the east midlands, where investment is still below the 1979 level. Will the Secretary of State ensure that he has good talks with a host of people who might have ideas about what he should do?

Mr. Heseltine: I can give the hon. Gentleman an unqualified assurance. I will talk to Toyota at Burnaston which is creating 3,000 new jobs, to Toray Textiles at Mansfield which has created 400 new jobs, to Walkers and Sons in Leicester which has created 250 new jobs, to Land's End at Oakham which has created 100 new jobs, to Airwair of Woolaston in Northamptonshire which has created 70 new jobs and to Fisher Controls in Braunstone in Leicestershire which has created 66 new jobs. I can only say to the hon. Gentleman, who says that Labour has won all those seats, enjoy it while it lasts, because it will not be long.

Mrs. Angela Knight: Has my right hon. Friend seen the Price Waterhouse survey of Derbyshire firms, which was published last week, in which 80 per cent. of companies said that they were coming out of recession and that profits were improving and in which one third were proposing to increase their work forces? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should congratulate those companies and that the way forward is through a closer partnership between the Government and manufacturing industry to help companies invest and so create the jobs that are needed in that area and elsewhere in the country?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend is right, but why is it that one only ever sees support for the things that are going right in Derbyshire from hon. Members on the Government side of the House?

Commodity Prices

11. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the effect on businesses, consumers and trade of the recent changes in the price of commodities.

Mr. Sainsbury: The impact of movements in commodity prices varies between businesses.

Mr. Cohen: Following the exchange rate mechanism debacle eight months ago, which cost Britain about £2 billion, are not higher prices now in the pipeline? Is not that reflected by commodity price rises? Timber is up 126 per cent., sugar 46 per cent., coffee 38 per cent., beef—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Yes, reading. They are very high figures, are they not? Beef is up 35 per cent. and cotton 25 per cent. Will not that harm businesses and the standard of living of people on tight incomes and make the nation's economic recession worse? Are not the Government caught in a new web of recession of their own making?

Mr. Sainsbury: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will share the Government's view that the control of inflation is an extremely important objective and is very important to help manufacturing industry, particularly in export markets. I hope that he is also aware that food price inflation has been running at a very low level. It was only 1·5 per cent., which was lower than the general level of inflation in the year to March 1993.

The hon. Gentleman might not be aware that the chairman of one of our leading supermarket companies —indeed, I think that I can say the leading supermarket company in the country—recently forecast that true price inflation would increase from about 2 per cent. to 3 or 4 per cent. next year because of devaluation. We should like to see less, but that is not an astronomical figure.

Mr. Budgen: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a devaluation affects only some prices, not all prices, and that inflation can be caused only by an increase in the money supply?

Mr. Sainsbury: I am happy to agree with the first part of my hon. Friend's question. As he knows, were we to embark upon a discussion of the second part of his question, it is possible that we would not find ourselves entirely in agreement and we would certainly take up much of the House's time.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Does the Minister recognise that the price of commodities to manufacturers is now up more than 8 per cent., that that is a direct result of what happened in September and that we are in grave danger of going around the cycle again? When will the Government bring forward a policy for the long-term development and protection of our trade and manufacturing industry? That will be the only way out of the stop-go cycle.

Mr. Sainsbury: It sounds as though the hon. Gentleman is calling for not only regulation of trade but protection, or higher tariffs, against imports into this country, which of course would be an invitation to a trade war—just the thing in 1929 to 1931 reduced world trade by 40 per cent. and, as a consequence, reduced world output of manufactured goods by 30 per cent. That seems to be a more than usually stupid policy to be proposed, even by the Opposition.

Russian Federation

12. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet his counterparts in the Government of the Russian Federation to discuss bilateral trade.

Mr. Heseltine: Deputy Prime Minister Shokhin, with whom I established contact at the first meeting of the British-Russian steering committee on trade and investment in Moscow last September, and I attended a second meeting of that committee this morning. We plan to continue our talks tomorrow.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that business with the Soviet Union, or Russia as it is today, is well worth pursuing in the long term due to its huge resources in gold and oil? Regarding of the short term, my right hon. Friend's meeting this morning with Aleksandr Nicolaivitch Shokhin, what does he think will be the short-term benefits that will accrue?

Mr. Heseltine: I must crave the indulgence of the House, Madam Speaker. I was so carried away by the full explanation of where I have been today that I missed the important part of the question.

Madam Speaker: In that case we will have a question from Dr. Howells.

Mr. Fabricant *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Very well, but very quickly.

Mr. Fabricant: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is worth pursuing long-term prospects with Russia given its huge reserves of gold and oil? Given his meeting this morning with Aleksandr Nicolaivitch Shokhin, what short-term benefits does he believe will accrue?

Mr. Heseltine: I think that my hon. Friend, who has a considerable knowledge of these matters and a facility for articulating them, is right to ask the House this question. The conclusion that I draw is that we have much to gain in both the long and the short term.

Madam Speaker: It was worth a repeat performance.

Dr. Howells: Does the President of the Board of Trade agree that one of the greatest success stories of British exports to the former Soviet Union—to Kazakhstan and Russia—is that of British Gas? British Gas is deeply concerned that if it is broken up, as some propose it should be, it will no longer be large enough to be a world player and to take British exports to those countries.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will realise that these matters are currently before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. It would therefore not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Overseas Trade Services

13. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people the Overseas Trade Services employs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: At present, there are some 2,000 staff engaged in export promotion work within Overseas Trade

Services, including those employed in the commercial sections of Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts overseas.

Mr. Matthew Banks: While Britain currently enjoys record export levels, is my hon. Friend satisfied that we are doing everything possible to ensure that there is a proper range of services to help British business men win the orders that they rightly deserve?

Mr. Needham: One can never be satisfied. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade recently announced a new structure within the DTI which I think will go a long way towards meeting the needs mentioned by my hon. Friend. We have restructured the Overseas Project Board—and are in the process of doing so with the British Overseas Trade Board—to reflect business needs more closely. We have announced the taking on of 100 export promoters, of whom 33 are in place. We are strengthening the relationship between the Foreign Office and the DTI through the joint directorate and linking export promoters with DTI regional offices and, thereafter, this country as a whole. I am sure that, in a short time, we will be giving a package of support to our exporters which will be without equal anywhere in the world.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the Minister acknowledge the competitiveness of the British aerospace industry, which exported £5·5 billion worth of its products last year? May I tell the Minister of a great little export earner in my constituency, the 125 executive jet made at the Broughton works? May I further tell him of the concern of the work force there—not just worry at the loss of 269 jobs from the production line, but fear that that efficient unit may soon be bought, lock, stock and barrel by an American company? What can the Minister do to assuage the fears of the work force? Is he prepared to visit the factory and to meet management and labour?

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend has already visited the plant. Obviously it will be a commercial decision for British Aerospace. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to congratulate the British Aerospace company and its subsidiaries—and all other companies in aerospace—on the success of their exports, which I am sure will continue. We can be proud of many other industries in this country, whose export performances are getting better day by day.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Can my hon. Friend assure us that there will be adequate staffing to ensure the proper packaging of exports of British goods and services, as was carried out in the Kuwait reconstruction and the recent Proyecto Venezuela? It is a very effective way of putting across opportunities for Britain in these markets.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend recently announced an additional 60 posts to deal with the 80 top markets for British exports. As I have said, we are in the process of putting in place an export promotion assistance package that no other country in the world can better.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

14. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the staffing levels in the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Heseltine: ECGD's staffing levels are periodically reviewed and determined as part of the annual public expenditure survey and the Minis scrutiny.

Mr. Spellar: I think that it is unfortunate that the right hon. Gentleman could not be more forthcoming on the figures. One suspects that that gives substance to the concerns expressed by the staff of ECGD on this matter. Although an increase in the amounts available is welcome, would not it be a good idea to give an assurance to the staff that their jobs will be secure and that we will therefore have the necessary back-up to progress what will, one hopes, be an increase in exports?

Mr. Heseltine: I cannot answer that question in the way in which the hon. Gentleman wants. I have looked in great detail at the number of people employed in providing this service. I was extremely concerned at the overheads involved in providing support to the front-line services and, therefore, I have asked for some urgent reviews to take place, which it is my proper responsibility to do.

Northern Cyprus

15. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the total value of *(a)* imports and *(b)* exports between the United Kingdom and northern Cyprus in the last three years for which records are kept.

Mr. Needham: The Government do not recognise the northern Cyprus regime. Therefore, northern Cyprus is not separately identified by Customs and Excise in the United Kingdom trade statistics.

Mr. O'Hara: Is not it the case, as the recent exploits of Asil Nadir brought to public attention, that a considerable amount of trade goes on between the United Kingdom and northern Cyprus? Should not the Government now take a closer interest in the terms under which such trade is conducted? In particular, how many of the business assets through which that trade is conducted belong legally to refugees who were dispossessed in 1974? Is not it an insult to those refugees that in the last honours list an OBE was awarded to a northern Cyprus business man for his services to trade with the United Kingdom? Should not the Government now review their policy of accepting export credit certificates from a regime which the United Kingdom does not recognise and which evidently does not recognise any obligations to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman is fully aware that the trade that takes place between the island of Cyprus and the United Kingdom is regulated through the association agreement with the Community and, therefore, is a Community matter. We recognise the island of Cyprus as a whole and it would be unthinkable to the people on the rest of the island if we differentiated between one part and another.

Manufacturing Industry

16. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the parts of manufacturing industry which show the greatest potential for growth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Department's objective is to encourage and assist all sectors of the United Kingdom's manufacturing industry to become more competitive both at home and abroad.

Mr. Greenway: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that between 1 million and 1·5 million more people are in work now than were in work in 1983? That means that more than 25 million people are in jobs in the United Kingdom. Are not a substantial number of those in the manufacturing industries? Will my right hon. Friend encourage small business—while not neglecting large business—to provide jobs, because that is where a large potential for increase in manufacturing jobs lies?

Mr. Sainsbury: I very much agree that smaller businesses have a valuable role not only in manufacturing industry but in the provision of employment opportunities. Indeed, that is why the Government have a comprehensive range of services to assist small firms, including the small firms loan guarantee scheme, which was enhanced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget; consultancies under the enterprise initiative; one-stop shops, which will give a better service to small firms; and the partnership sourcing initiative.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why should not regional policy be framed in such a way as to back growth sectors of the economy? On the whole question of regional policy, when will we have a statement from the Government on the redrawing of the assisted areas map? It is causing deep concern in my county of Cumbria.

Mr. Sainsbury: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman is concerned to have an announcement—we will certainly make one as soon as we can. He is aware that the proposals for the new map for assisted areas are subject to the approval of the Commission. We can never be sure how long the Commission will take to give us that approval, as I drew to the attention of the House in answer to an earlier question.

The hon. Gentleman is well aware that regional policy is directed at providing better employment opportunities in areas of the country that suffer from a lack of employment opportunities relative to other more prosperous areas.

Arab Boycott

18. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the implications of the Arab boycott on British exports.

Mr. Needham: I receive representations about the Arab boycott from time to time, but we cannot measure its effect on United Kingdom exports.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that such an iniquitous boycott must affect the level of United Kingdom exports? As the German and American Governments are willing to legislate against the boycott, will he explain why the British Government will not? May we have an assurance that the matter will be discussed at the forthcoming G7 conference?

Mr. Needham: I cannot give such an assurance to my hon. Friend, but I will make sure that his comments are passed on. We have not followed the line taken by the Governments of the United States or Germany because in this matter we take the views of British companies and exporters carefully into account. Those companies do not believe that the introduction of such legislation in this country would be effective, because it would be unenforceable.

Deregulation Unit

20. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a further statement about the work of the deregulation unit.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Departments are conducting a comprehensive review of all their regulations. Seven business task forces are also undertaking a comprehensive review of all the regulations that affect those industrial sectors. We are also urging the European Community to consult business and consider the burden that its proposals might impose on it. At the local level, there are nine partnerships between local authorities and business in local areas. Local authorities and business are trying to learn from their experience of working with one another.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my hon. Friend encourage the civil service unions to be less defensive about the proposals and remind them that public service efficiency will be enhanced by the work of the unit?

Mr. Hamilton: I agree with my hon. Friend. There will ultimately be gains for the Government, and hence for the taxpayer, from the deregulation initiative. It can be in nobody's interest to have red tape entangling them. Nor is it in anyone's interest to have taxpayers' money wasted on unnecessary rules and regulations.

Abortion Clinics (Access)

3.31 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit interference with, and intimidation or harassment of, any person using an abortion clinic or any person employed therein, and the obstruction of access to such premises; to provide remedies for persons affected by such acts; to require information on counselling services to be given to persons seeking an abortion; and for connected purposes.

The activities referred to in the Bill should be written into our law as a clear criminal offence. When it boils down to it, such activity is another form of violence towards women, in this case women who are already in an anxious state.

Abortion is legal. It is outrageous that, after making a painful and difficult decision, perhaps after careful counselling and discussion with their partner, women attending clinics for treatment should be the subject of abuse and harassment and placed in fear of violence. The same goes for clinical workers.

Seven weeks ago, Rescue America despicably forced several women to run the gauntlet of its abuse and intimidation. A report of that appeared in *The Guardian* on 2 April. One woman said:

"I couldn't believe the way they just descended on me. They swarmed around me and I was very frightened."

When she arrived at the clinic, she burst into tears. She said:

"Having an abortion is not an easy decision and I was already feeling emotionally unstable. These people just took advantage of that. I was shaking and crying and had to go and sit in a room to calm myself down . . . They are not going to achieve anything like this. Women think very carefully about having abortions and these people are not going to change anybody's mind. I think they are all sick and very intimidating. I believe that everyone has the right to hold an opinion but these people hounded me. I felt like a criminal and am still very disturbed by what happened . . . It was very distressing and occurred at a time when I have enough to worry about already."

Those were the words of a woman who was harassed by Rescue America.

The activities of Rescue America and Rescue Outreach are becoming increasingly violent in the United States. The groups do not merely block access. They have undertaken fire bombings, arson attacks and acid attacks on clinics. They have stormed hospital theatres. There have been shootings. A Florida doctor was shot dead outside his clinit earlier this year. The director of Rescue America, Don Treshman, called it "unfortunate" and added chillingly:

"had he not been killed, many more babies would have died at his hands."

Last year marked a record for violence against clinics in the United States. There were 1,107 acts of serious violence such as bombing, arson, chemical contamination, invasion and vandalism. It cost almost $50 million. Special camps were set up to train members to read licence plates, follow people and harass them at home, and illegally enter schools to leaflet children with pictures of foetuses.

With such fanaticism, there must be a real danger of harm to women arriving at abortion clinics and to the workers there. The people involved are trying to export this intimidation and violence to the United Kingdom. They have set up Rescue UK, and training courses have been organised by their American counterparts. These include instruction on how to intervene physically, with violence. James Morrow, the founder of Rescue UK, has been arrested more than a dozen times, and in 1989 he was convicted of assault on a pregnant clinic manager.

I believe that, for infamy and ignominy, the demonstrations that took place outside abortion clinics seven weeks ago were on a par with those of the racist dockers in the 1960s. The rights of women should be protected by law, yet the role of the police was far from satisfactory. They did not ensure complete freedom of access or freedom from intimidation. They put the demonstrators first and the women second. At some demonstrations, they refused to allow women to go through on their own, despite the fact that these women were engaging in lawful personal business, and, on grounds of public order, they also refused to allow escorts, such as those from the National Abortion Campaign, to accompany the women.

With such tactics, the police were, in effect, doing Operation Rescue's job for it. It is also known that some of the police officers involved expressed their support for Operation Rescue. Policing tactics were inconsistent, being down to individual police officers. That is most unsatisfactory. The Home Office should produce some consistent guidelines and ensure that women's rights are paramount.

In our democracy, anti-abortion groups have the right to demonstrate. They can lobby Parliament and march through London or any other town. However, they should not be allowed to abuse individual women who, having made an often painful and difficult decision, are attending clinics for treatment that they are, by law, allowed to have. Threatening individual women who are seeking treatment is cowardly. My Bill puts the women's rights and their safety first. It creates a clear criminal offence where there is intimidation or where people's access is blocked.

It is necessary to give women a choice at an earlier stage, when they are considering what to do. That is why my Bill puts on general practitioners an onus to inform women what sort of counselling is available and might be helpful to them. Violent demonstration and intimidation should be no part of the process. The Home Secretary was right to have Don Treshman of Rescue America arrested and deported on the grounds that his activities were not conducive to the public good. However, that was not a satisfactory mechanism. In any case, we have our own home-grown intimidation and women bashers. Nor are obstruction laws the right ones to use in these circumstances. We saw how the police implemented those laws: they prevented women from securing their legal rights. We need a clear-cut law making it illegal to block access to abortion clinics.

It is ironic that one outcome of these incidents is that demonstrations in the royal parks are not acceptable. In the interests of the women and clinic workers, demonstrations outside abortion clinics should not be acceptable. We should have this law in place before these dangerous fanatics return in September, as they have vowed to do.

The Bill is supported by the National Abortion Campaign and the Abortion Law Reform Group. Last week, one anti-abortion hon. Member tabled a motion on obscenity. It urges the Government to balance freedom of speech with their responsibility to protect children, women and men from degradation and violence. I similarly seek to protect women who are lawfully using abortion clinics

from this latest form of violence by anti-abortion extremists. An editorial on this issue in *The Independent* concluded with these words:

"Women should know that they can have abortions within the law without fear of intimidation or more distress than they will in any case experience."

My Bill enshrines that.

3.40 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I wish to oppose the motion. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) raised a number of important issues on which opinions in the House and outside are deeply held and strongly felt.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the recent scenes that we have witnessed outside both abortion clinics and the administrative headquarters of those who advocate abortion. Those of us who are members of the all-party parliamentary pro-life group have no truck whatever with those individuals or organisations, whatever their views or philosophy, who advocate violence, intimidation or the flouting of the law as a means of furthering their ends.

That rejection of violence and intimidation applies to those from the Socialist Workers party and the National Abortion Campaign who have turned up with the deliberate intention of disrupting peaceful demonstrations, rallies and religious services. It applies equally to those who share our abhorrence of abortion but adopt methods with which we have no sympathy and to which we give no support.

Our opposition to the criminal destruction of property in abortion clinics is as strong as our opposition to the destruction of property that took place during the debate on the Bill introduced some time ago by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), when the headquarters of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children was ransacked by pro-abortion extremists. Our opposition to assaults on any person seeking or advocating an abortion is as strong as our opposition to the sort of cowardly attack which was perpetrated some time ago on the then Father of the House and right hon. Member for Castle Point, Sir Bernard Braine, who was assaulted by a gang of pro-abortion thugs outside a prayer meeting at the Royal Albert hall.

I hope that I have shown that there is some common ground between myself and the hon. Member for Leyton, but despite our common rejection of violence as a means of achieving political change within our parliamentary democracy, I cannot support his appeal. Violence and intimidation are already illegal in this country, as indeed are crimes against property. There already exists a wide range of powers available to the courts to deal with such activities, whether they take place outside abortion clinics or outside factories.

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would be so keen to ask for tougher action against those on the Timex picket line? The law surely must be applied firmly, but fairly and equally, to protect all who seek to exercise their right to demonstrate peacefully, and to prevent violence and intimidation wherever it arises.

The hon. Member for Leyton seeks also to liberalise still further the Abortion Act 1967 by creating a new requirement to provide information and counselling services, which suggests that there is a right under present legislation to have an abortion. That is not the case. The legislation merely provides a defence against prosecution if abortion is performed under one of a given set of circumstances. It does not provide for a right of access to abortion.

That is an important legal point, because it is now common practice to interpret the legislation differently, with many doctors openly operating a policy of abortion on demand. The result is that more than 90 per cent. of abortions are performed for reasons of social convenience. A staggering 3·7 million abortions have now been performed under the terms of the Abortion Act. Of those, only 151—or 0·004 per cent.—were performed in emergency to save the life of the mother.

The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), when he promoted the legislation 25 years ago, told us that abortion would liberate women and make every child a wanted child. The opposite has been the effect. Abortion has allowed society to sweep under the carpet the very problems for which it was hailed as a panacea.

Abortion has failed abysmally. It allows the continuing exploitation of women and their health and, as the inexorable increase in child abuse has shown, the devaluation of human life before birth has altered society's attitudes to children after birth. The hon. Member for Leyton and those who profess their faith in the nostrum of liberal abortion laws can now look back on 25 years of failure, of the exploitation of women, and of the slaughter of unborn children.

For those reasons, we should not give the hon. Member leave to bring in his Bill. Those listening to what is said today should take note of the fact that a decision not to divide the House should not be taken to mean support for this measure. It is simply a sign that there are many important issues on today's Order Paper—issues on which hon. Members want to make progress without wasting time by dividing the House over an issue which is little more than a stunt to enable those who share the hon. Gentleman's extremist views to curry favour with their supporters in the pro-abortion lobby outside the House.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms Jean Corston, Mr. Bill Etherington, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mr. Eddie Loyden, Mr. Bill Michie, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mrs. Audrey Wise.

ABORTION CLINICS (ACCESS)

Mr. Harry Cohen accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit interference with, and intimidation or harassment of, any person using an abortion clinic or any person employed therein, and the obstruction of access to such premises; to provide remedies for persons affected by such acts; to require information on counselling services to be given to persons seeking an abortion; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 July and to be printed. [Bill 199.]

Opposition Day

[12TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Automated Credit Transfer

Madam Speaker: There is a great deal of interest in the two debates today. I appeal to hon. Members for short speeches. I am not in a position to put a time limit on speeches, but I do ask for co-operation from hon. Members when they are speaking.

I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.47 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move,

That this House calls on Her Majesty's Government to make clear without qualification that the use of Automated Credit Transfer in the payment of pensions and benefits is a decision for the free choice of the individual customer and that there will be no element of compulsion or undue pressure from the Department of Social Security; and condemns the uncertainty for customers that has resulted from the Government's current campaign on Automated Credit Transfer and the threat to the important social and economic role in the community of sub-post offices which is being undermined by this Government's mismanagement of the economy and its determination to pave the way for privatisation.

This is a debate about choice and about fairness. I want to make it clear at the beginning that I am not arguing against the use of automated credit transfers. That option is properly available to clients of the DSS and is used by them in increasing numbers. Our case is essentially that the method of paying pensions is a matter for the customer, and for that person alone.

Replying to the Adjournment debate last Thursday, the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) said that scaremongering is behind this campaign. That was an irresponsible statement. The basis for this debate is the widespread and genuine concern that has been reflected in the mail of every hon. Member, irrespective of party. This is particularly an issue in rural areas, but not only in rural areas.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way. Does he recollect that a couple of years ago his hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) went around the country telling the sick and the elderly that the new GP contract would lead to doctors spending less time with patients? That proved untrue. It was a scare story put around for party political ends. Is not this story out of exactly the same mould?

Mr. Dewar: No. The hon. Gentleman's question was a rather clumsy attempt at a diversion. I at least intend to speak about the subject of the debate.

The cause of the dissent is the open determination of the Government to encourage the use of ACT and the methods that have been used to promote that. We must be clear about the complaint. The starting point is the decision to review the form sent to those who have become eligible for retirement pensions inviting them to opt for a method of payment. Three types of form have been tested, each sent to 8,000 customers. That in itself is not sinister, and Ministers have persistently offered reassurances to customers.

A typical example was the Under-Secretary of State for Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry, who on 19 April wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). He said:

"I understand that all three versions of the form made clear to recipients that there was a choice of payment methods."

The Minister may understand that—he can understand what he likes—but the forms do not do that, and that is the essence of our complaint.

The first version is the one that clearly sets out the options. As well as variations of ACT, it contains a clear invitation to opt for post office payment. The recipient is invited, if he or she wishes, to complete a form specifying the post office that is to be used. That is fair enough, but the second version is quite different. The first page is an extensive sales pitch for ACT and the page contains no mention of a post office order book.

On the section that is to be completed to indicate choice, there is an extensive invitation to opt for ACT. People have to read what can properly and fairly be described as a footnote which says that people may express an interest in payment through a post office. If people say yes to that method, they are told that they will receive a letter about it, which is hardly an open invitation.

The third form which has been distributed and market tested is even more ingenious. There was a four-page hard sell for ACT alone, and again the alternative was relegated to the small print. This time it merely states:

"Do you want to be paid by other means?"

At no point was post office payment mentioned. Those who stood firm and expressed interest in other means were told that they would be written to—to what effect is not yet clear.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, whatever retrospective deficiencies there may have been in some pilot forms, the Government have made it obvious on every occasion that it is up to the customer to decide? The hon. Gentleman said that he accepted that ACT was used and that many people want to use it. Therefore, his position is exactly the same as that of the Government and he does his personal reputation no credit by indulging in the scaremongering that has been going on.

Mr. Dewar: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman recognises that, if I am scaremongering, then over the past week the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), for Rochford (Dr. Clark), for Corby (Mr. Powell) and many other hon. Members have been scaremongering as well. But they have not: they are reflecting the genuine worries of their constituents, and the hon. Gentleman should recognise that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: Of course I will, as I mentioned the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Arnold: Although the hon. Gentleman mentioned me, he clearly did not hear what I said. In the debate last night I said that it was quite reasonable for the Government to issue samples to test the reaction to

different forms. The clear response was that people wanted to continue to be paid through the post office. The sampling is quite in order. I did not engage in scaremongering.

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Hon. Members: Withdraw. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dewar: The flying picket for debates such as this is in the Chamber. Hon. Members will have to live with the fact that it beggars belief to argue, as the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) argued, that in retrospect there might have been an odd mistake but, basically, the whole thing was well intentioned. There was a deliberate attempt to restrict choice by withholding information, and there is no escape from that.

If it is suggested that that was some sort of idle exercise carried out on a dull afternoon by a civil servant on a whim which meant nothing, we are being asked to believe the unbelievable. The Secretary of State for Social Security allowed his enthusiasm for ACT to override common sense and sought to persuade a large number of people to opt for it by suggesting that that, in effect, was the only option open to them, and that borders on the dishonest.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will my hon. Friend add to his sentiments the representations that I have received from hundreds of my constituents and those of thousands of other constituents who have written to their Members of Parliament? There is no scaremongering. People are concerned about the devious way in which the Government have approached the issue. It should be impressed upon Conservative Members that this is a serious matter about which millions are concerned.

Mr. Dewar: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am not aware of the results of the test, but I need not be fearless and run risks to predict that those who were given the form that did not even mention the post office option almost certainly opted in much larger numbers for ACT, and that was the whole point of the exercise.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Government have let the cat out of the bag by stating in their amendment that their aim is to reduce cost, and they are doing that by forcing people to use the means of payment that they wish them to use, which is causing great resentment throughout the country? It shows the Government's ruthlessness that they are prepared to disregard the wishes of the British people in order to reduce costs.

Mr. Dewar: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: I take this opportunity to say that I heed your statement, Madam Speaker, about the need for reasonably short speeches. If I give way constantly, I shall stop others speaking. Therefore, I shall give way once or twice in a little while, but——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way to me?

Mr. Dewar: I cannot resist that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I have the three forms here and all of them say:

"Ask at your local post office".

Mr. Dewar: I have the forms here. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady has made a point that I cannot confirm. What I have here is a form that has on the front page a hard sell for ACT and, on the second page—what one might call the executive section—an invitation to go for ACT. At the bottom it says:

"Do you want to be paid by other means?"

Against the yes box it says:

"We will write to you about this".

Is that a fair and unbiased attempt to offer choice?

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester) *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: It is as if, if I may say to the hon. Gentleman who is looking so keen, at one of the excellent restaurants in his city, six items were provided by the kitchen and there was to be a fair choice, but only five were put on the menu and then surprise was expressed that no one had opted for the sixth—of course, because no one knew it was there. It is that kind of weighted choice that is deplorable.

It is the Secretary of State who will reply to the debate, so he must tell us what the test was about. What was it meant to achieve? If it was not a whim or a joke, if it was not something done, as I say, to fill an afternoon, what on earth was it all about? Why should we not believe the point that has been put by many of the Secretary of State's right hon. and hon. Friends—certainly by his hon. Friends—that it was no more than an attempt to weight choice?

The Secretary of State will remember that it was the hon. Member for Rochford who said—I paraphrase—that the only conclusion that he could draw from what had happened was that it was a way of discovering how the wool could most effectively be pulled over the eyes of the customer. That was the considered view of a responsible Conservative Back Bencher and someone to whom the right hon. Gentleman should pay attention.

Let us consider in passing a little of the history of the matter and take, for example, the reply given to a parliamentary question on 12 March by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe). She said:

"Post Office Counters Limited was made aware of the trial."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. *751*.]

That is true up to a point; but it was not made aware of what was happening in detail or the form that the trial would take.

A letter that I received from Mr. R. T. B. Dykes, who I understand is managing director of Post Office Counters, is of interest in terms of the honesty and openness with which the matter has been handled. There was a discussion with Post Office Counters last September, when it was told—and this came as no surprise, according to Mr. Dykes—that the Government were examining possible ways of increasing ACT penetration. Mr. Dykes writes:

"At that stage there were no firm plans and our negotiators requested details of the nature, location and timing of any trials of such new approaches. We also stressed to DSS that it was essential that we be provided with as much information as possible of their plans, as they would be a source of considerable concern both to Counters and to the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters.

There the matter rested for two months until December 1992 when DSS told us that they had been specifically targeted to increase ACT take up from its current level of 14 per cent. to 20 per cent. by 1995-96. When Counters asked how they proposed to do this their response was vague, but they repeated that they would be seeking to trial new claim

[Mr. Dewar]

forms, as well as extending ACT to groups to which it was not available. Our negotiators repeated their request for details of their plans. We heard nothing more until 2 March"

when they were told by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters that they had found the forms in circulation.

"I also have to tell you that our requests for information on the outcome of the trial have been rejected by DSS and that they have refused to give us any details of their plans for Mailshots to existing beneficiaries.

I hope that this letter will reassure you that we had no involvement in, nor were we consulted about, the trial of which you rightly complain. It does seem to me that DSS have been less than straightforward in their handling of this matter, and I have expressed my extreme concern about this issue to Michael Bichard, the Benefits Agency Chief Executive"

I express my concern also on behalf of the Opposition, and of a large number of Conservative Members. Some Conservative Members accuse us of scaremongering, but that account learly shows that Mr. Dykes and his colleagues at Post Office Counters believed they were kept deliberately in the dark—and I put it at at least that. No one can say that we have been scaremongering in raising the matter on the Floor of the House.

Ministers should remember the Government's rhetoric. We hear about choice, protecting choice, level playing fields, and open government. Over the past few months, we have seen an example of the reality—and that is very different from the rhetoric. One cannot exercise choice if one has no knowledge of the options available.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be embarrassed if I congratulate him on securing this debate, which will give the House a chance to reassure all the people who are frightened that they will be unable to collect their benefits at a post office in future and all the sub-postmasters and mistresses who are worried about their future income.

Mr. Dewar: I also take that point seriously. This is an important debate. The only scaremongering is the scare that has been put into the Government by the public campaign and the campaign in the House, which will force the Government to abandon their clear strategy and underhand tactics. I repeat the words of the hon. Member for Rochford on Thursday night:

"The forms are designed to discover how effectively the wool can be pulled over the eyes of those who receive pensions and benefits."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1993; Vol. 1034, c. 224.]

In the same debate, the hon. Member for St. Ives made it clear that he does not believe it was a fair example of market testing, when people were not told the options open to them.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the hon. Gentleman unequivocally deny that the words

"Ask at your local post office"

are on each of the forms?

Mr. Dewar: No. What I am saying is that the forms are totally misleading and totally weighted. If any reasonable people had read form B or form C, they would, in my view, have come to the conclusion that they were expected to go for automated credit transfer and that that option was being forced upon them; of that there can be no doubt at all. That is the view of sub-postmasters, Conservative Back Benchers, the media and Post Office Counters. Frankly, that would have been the view of any sensible person who, as a potential customer, had read the forms.

The Minister may be reduced to making the charge that we are scaremongering, but let me remind him that a third of the business of Post Office Counters comes from the Department of Social Security. Let us not forget that all the talk of broadening the base to replace the custom that would have been lost by post offices boils down to the suggestion that, at some future point, post offices may be allowed to sell national lottery tickets. That may be a good idea. I do not object to it. However, it would have been highly speculative compensation for the loss of business that would have resulted from the artificial restriction of choice that was invited and planned for in the forms to which I referred.

The importance of rural post offices—their place in the community as a point of contact and as an information exchange—will not be challenged in this House. I do not pretend that each of them is a place of romance and mystery that would find its place conveniently in a Hovis advertisement, but I know from personal experience and from the many people to whom I have spoken that post offices are valued and are regarded as integral and important parts of the community.

Rural communities are fragile, in some cases because of the actions of this Government. I am thinking of the way in which small pharmacies have been treated and of the way that rural bus services have been treated. There is now the potential, as a result of this strategy, to undermine local post offices.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), the Under-Secretary of State for Technology, claimed in his letter of 19 April fully to understand the importance of DSS transactions to post offices, but he went on to argue that the DSS is required to deliver its benefits as economically as possible. Of course I understand the importance of economy. As the Minister knows, in the past few months there has been a devastating series of reports—from Select Committees, the National Audit Office, and the ombudsman—pointing to the inefficiency with which his Department operates and delivers its services.

I certainly want to see increased efficiency, but wider considerations ought to be borne in mind in a policy area such as this. I do not believe that we should try to trick —I believe that is a fair way of putting it—people into taking one option at the expense of another by excluding information when its exclusion would do so much damage to the structure of our communities.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon:) We have heard a great deal about extension of choice as the rationale for this survey, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that some people will lose choice altogether if the result of small rural post offices losing business is that they close down and people have to travel many miles to find alternative facilities? Is it not more important to ensure that that basic choice remains, and that if there is to be a loss of revenue to post offices as a result of ACT, the making up of that revenue must be guaranteed to allow post offices to stay in business?

Mr. Dewar: I certainly agree with that. It was the reason for the anger, discontent and unease that was so evident on the Conservative Benches until the whippers-in got to work for the purposes of this afternoon's debate.

I do not believe that efficiency must equate with a demolition job on the traditional role of sub-post offices. That, I believe, was the point of the intervention by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). The Minister set out his stall on many occasions, arguing for ACT. The Federation of Sub-Postmasters is entitled to put forward its points about the convenience and friendly services offered by post offices.

Perhaps I could be allowed the luxury of saying that it is not just a question of rural post offices. My constituency, which borders the marches of western Glasgow, is a housing scheme constituency. There is great distress there and a genuine feeling of social loss when a post office closes. If we take the classic peripheral housing schemes in my city of Glasgow—I am thinking of Drumchapel, Castlemilk and Easterhouse—in which between 70,000 and 80,000 people live, there is only one bank in each scheme and there is not a single building society in any of them. Therefore, sub-post offices have an important role. Even after the substantial closures—more than 2,500 since 1979—there are still more sub-post office outlets than are provided by the four big banks in England and Wales and the six top building societies put together.

There are many reasons why we should be careful to preserve the local post office system, including the potential for bank charges. Lord Henley, the Minister in the House of Lords for the Department of Social Security, said in a recent letter, which I have read:

"The banks have not yet introduced charges and indeed some of them have recently said they do not intend to do so."

The news that some have not yet and that some may not introduce charges hardly has the ring of confidence as to what may happen if we lose our national network.

Another problem is that of weekly payments. If one believes that an electronic notebook is an essential sign of civilisation, one may not have much sympathy with the idea that people budget on a weekly basis. However, many of my constituents do not want to be paid four weeks in arrears or once in 13 weeks. They want to ensure that the ACT scheme does not go ahead.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dewar: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way; I have already spoken for longer than I intended.

Conservative Members may talk about scaremongering, but when they see that the Government are in trouble or as soon as they see that a Minister is low in the water, the immediate cry is, "It is scaremongering" or, "He must be an innocent victim." However, I have never seen a less innocent victim than the Secretary of State for Social Security. He planned a little job by stealth, he has been found out, and he should pay the price.

It is not only Labour which is suggesting that the situation is serious. Hon. Members will be aware of the views of Mr. Bill Cockburn, the chief executive of the Post Office, who suggested that, if the wrong forms emerged from the test—why were they being tested if not for possible use?—as many as 5,000 post offices could be forced to close. He said:

"If such a thing were to happen, the entire network of post offices would be on the line."

That is not an irresponsible scare story concocted by Labour. We are taking up a cause that is well documented and an anxiety that is very real.

I know that ACT is growing. My objection is that the Government should not try to encourage it artificially by withholding information. The right to choose is important. The Minister should support that idea, but he cannot if the choice is not properly explained. In the rush for economy, he has been prepared to manipulate and mislead, and that is a serious matter which the House should consider.

Are the Conservatives who are protesting today happy that £3·5 million will be spent in 1993-94 on encouraging the growth of ACT? Certainly one can buy a lot of persuasion for £3·5 million, but one should not do so in the underhand way in which this operation was mounted and launched.

The Minister tells us that there is nothing to fear. He may be right. He may favour the view of the hon. Member for Corby, who, during the spring Adjournment motion debate on 18 May, said:

"Frankly, it is incredible that the Government have got themselves into this absurd position. The heads of those who were responsible for drafting the extremely maladroit letters —to put the matter mildly—should be presented on a plate. It is one of the most serious political misjudgments, and a matter that my right hon. Friends must do much more to correct at once. These things did not happen when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was responsible for the Department which seems to be at fault in this case."—[*Official Report*, 18 May 1993; Vol. 225, c. 178.]

That is another ringing vote of confidence for the Secretary of State for Social Security! If that is the explanation—that it is bungling, maladroit, incompetent and stupid—perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would prefer to plead guilty to the underhand dealings which I suspect are the truth of the matter.

The Prime Minister is now offering assurances of his commitment to retain a national network of post offices. The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) is reported in *The Times* today as saying:

"that clear statement . . . will dispel all anxiety".

I must tell the Secretary of State that all anxiety will not be dispelled—[*Interruption.*] Let me finish my sentence. All anxiety will not be dispelled by a generalised statement of that kind—of the kind that we have so often heard. I want the anxiety to be dispelled and the fears laid to rest. It was in order to give the Government a chance to do that that we initiated the debate.

I understand that the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West—again, I have to rely on *The Times* for my information—was called in by the Secretary of State to hear of his revised proposals. That implies that the Secretary of State has now, late in the day, admitted that his proposals need revision. If there are revised proposals, it is appropriate that the House should hear them now.

I want the Secretary of State unashamedly to save his skin by backing down and doing another U-turn—the Government have had plenty of practice at that. It is in the public interest that the right hon. Gentleman should now recant. I do not want another generalised statement; I want him to tell us why he launched the test and to give an absolute commitment that he will now abandon it, and will shred and scrap any document that does not give a fair range of options to the public. I want him to say that he will ensure that in future the one guiding principle will be

[Mr. Dewar]

that people should be informed of their rights and the decision on what to do should be theirs alone. We want not generalised commitment but specific action to undo the damage and to lay the fears to rest. I commend the motion to the House.

4.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"endorses Her Majesty's Government's clear commitment to freedom of choice in the means by which social security benefits are paid, while reducing fraud and unnecessary costs by extending the availability of Automated Credit Transfer to all benefits and encouraging people with bank accounts to choose to have benefits paid into their accounts, to the continuation of a national network of post offices and sub-post offices and to securing the efficient and effective delivery of the vital service which the Post Office provides.".

Before responding to the extraordinary speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), may I refer briefly to the two-hour paving debate on the same subject that, rather unusually, preceded the debate last Thursday? That debate was exceptional both in length and in quality. Every contribution was more balanced, less partisan, and better than the one that we have heard from the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Every hon. Member who spoke on Thursday expressed concern about the future of sub-post offices. Of course, I shall respond to that concern. But every hon. Member tried to avoid making party political points, and every hon. Member from every party tried to avoid scaremongering, unlike the hon. Member for Garscadden, whose whole approach is based on scaring the poor, the sick and the needy. Indeed, since he has been shadow social security spokesman his principal stock-in-trade has been scaremongering.

Last autumn, full of foreboding, he warned the media that I would be unable to fulfil our pledge to uprate pensions. He was wrong. Before the Budget he said that the Chancellor would introduce taxation on invalidity benefit then and there. He was wrong. Now he forecasts that we are about to close rural post offices. I have news for the hon. Gentleman, which will be no surprise to my hon. Friends. He is wrong again. I challenge him to name one scare story that he has told about my Department since he has had that job, which has come true. *[Interruption.]*—The hon. Gentleman's silence condemns him.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside) *rose*——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. It might be advantageous for the debate if the House were to settle down, quieten down, and listen to the debate.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Secretary Lilley.

Mr. Lilley: It may be helpful if I set out the order in which I shall deal with the issues before us. First, I shall spell out the Government's commitment to sub-post offices and to choice. Secondly, I shall explain why we are encouraging payment into bank accounts and building societies.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath) *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: In a moment.

Thirdly, I shall explain how we are encouraging automated credit transfer, and I shall deal in particular with the trial forms.

I shall largely leave the issue of privatisation to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology—or rather, the postmaster-general, as I imagine he is now called—who hopes to catch your eye at the end of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Secretary of State has explained how he intends to deal with the questions raised, but when will he deal with the question raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), which applies, for example, to the post office in Dalmellington in my constituency, which is just surviving at the moment? If the Secretary of State is successful and persuades just a small number of people to take ACT, that post office will close and all the people in Dalmellington will have no choice at all. Will he answer that key question now before he gets on to the other points?

Mr. Lilley: I will answer that question in the second part of my remarks. This is the pledge that we made in our manifesto—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already appealed for the Secretary of State to be given a fair hearing. *[Interruption.]* Order. I intend that that should be the case.

Mr. Lilley: The pledge in our manifesto said:

"We are committed to maintaining . . . a nation-wide network of post offices."

The words are unambiguous——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Mr. Lilley: Our commitment is unequivocal, and I can reaffirm it emphatically today.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before you came to the Chair, my right hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) gave way virtually every two minutes——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Lilley: No other party made such a pledge—indeed, neither the Labour party nor the Liberal party even mentioned sub-post offices in their manifestos, but now they are happy to hijack any campaign that comes along.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, especially on his party's manifesto. While he is reading that part out, will he read out the commitments on tax and particularly on VAT?

Mr. Lilley: There was no such pledge. */Laughter./* We made our pledge because we recognised the focal role that sub-post offices play in many communities, especially in rural areas. That role was spelt out eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) last Thursday and by many other right hon. and hon. Friends.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Does the Secretary of State accept that the problem affects not only rural communities but urban areas? Many people are concerned because they see choice being razed. The post offices will suffer a decline in their trade and go out of business if ACT is introduced. That is the core of the question and that is the fear that the right hon. Gentleman's pilot scheme has raised. Is it not worth saying that, although it may have been a useful exercise, the whole idea should now be abandoned?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely accept that sub-post offices in urban areas are also valuable and play an important role. I shall come on to that. I recognise the fears that have been aroused by the leaflet from the Sub Postmasters' Federation and I shall deal with that systematically if I am allowed to by the mob on the Opposition Benches.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I intend that we should have an orderly debate. It is for the Secretary of State to decide whether to give way and if he decides not to, hon. Members should resume their seats.

Mr. Lilley: I have spelt out our manifesto commitment. However, the maintenance of a network of post offices is not only a manifesto commitment; it is also in the direct self-interest of my Department. We need the post office network to deliver our benefits, especially—but not only—in rural areas. We will continue to need it for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman may find that what I am saying will satisfy his constituents, if not himself.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to complete my point, I will happily give way to him if he still has a query.

However successful we are in encouraging people to choose payment into bank accounts, there will still be many who prefer the present system, including millions who have no suitable account. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) said—I congratulate him on securing the debate the other night—if sub-post offices did not exist, we would need to invent them.

At the end of the day, that means that we must pay to help keep in being a viable network of sub-post offices and to make it profitable for postmasters and postmistresses to remain in business and deliver our benefits. We have always accepted that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Secretary of State will know that the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, who is sitting beside him, and I share most of the Lake district where there are many small hamlets, many of which have post offices. Will the Secretary of State give the Minister sitting beside him and me an assurance that the further introduction and promotion of ACT will not in any way prejudice the future of those small post offices in the Minister's constituency and in my constituency? May I have a clear assurance on that now from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Lilley: I have already given our assurance and I have reaffirmed our pledge to maintain a national network of sub-post offices and I am now explaining the mechanism by which that is achieved.

Mr. Graham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would allow me to explain that mechanism at greater length.

We have always accepted that we must make it profitable for postmasters to deliver our benefits. We do that via our contract with Post Office Counters Ltd and the terms are adjusted to reflect changing volumes of transactions, the switch from order books to ACT and all the other factors that affect viability.

As it so happens, the contract between the Benefits Agency and Post Office Counters Ltd. is currently being renegotiated. It is perhaps no coincidence that blood-curdling warnings about the collapse of the branch network are circulating at this time. It is often the way when a contract is being negotiated that rather extreme statements are made.

I do not want to pursue the negotiations in public. Suffice it to say that I am confident that we will agree a sensible contract which reflects the common interest of both Post Office Counters Ltd. and the Benefits Agency in maintaining a viable network.

Mr. Dewar: I want to be clear about what the Secretary of State is saying. I took the implication of those remarks to be that he thinks that the present campaign has been deliberately promoted, as a means of putting pressure on his Department, by the Post Office in its negotiations and that it is therefore dishonest and totally self-interested. Is that the Secretary of State's position?

Mr. Lilley: I merely mentioned the common coincidence between blood-curdling warnings and negotiations.

Hon. Members have from us a triple assurance that we will maintain a viable network of post offices: we are pledged to do so, we need that network to deliver our benefits and we are prepared to pay to help sustain that network through our contract with the Post Office.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The nub of the issue is choice. For choice to be real, Department of Social Security customers must have free and equal information about all the options available to them. Will the Secretary of State accept that as a fundamental principle which he will implement? Does he also accept that the forms that were sent out fell way short of that principle?

Mr. Lilley: As I have said, I will come to the issue of the forms in due course and deal frankly with the hon. Gentleman's point.

On top of the assurances that we have given, we believe in encouraging sub-post offices to diversify into new businesses. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was right to emphasise that point in the debate the other night. The Government have already made it clear that they are more than willing for post

[Mr. Lilley]

offices to be a selling point for the national lottery, should the successful contractor choose to sell tickets in that way. The possibility of allowing Post Office Counters Ltd. wider powers to take on new products and offer other services is being actively considered as part of the Post Office review.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Secretary of State remind the House of the exact nature of the assurance that he has just given? Is he assuring the House that no small post office or sub-post office will close as a result of a lack of business or loss of business caused by his campaign to switch to ACT? Is he going to arrange the contract with post offices in such a way that no small post office will close as a result of his campaign? Yes or no?

Mr. Lilley: No Minister and no Government can guarantee that every post office will remain in operation. As the hon. Gentleman knows, each year 700 postmasters and postmistresses resign. Some are replaced, and sometimes the location is moved. But I have given an assurance that we will maintain the viability of the national network and will do that through our contract. We have shown our commitment to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: Perhaps hon. Members will allow me to make a little more progress.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. About six hon. Members on each side of the Chamber are attempting to intervene. The Secretary of State has indicated that he will not give way, so will hon. Members please remain in their seats?

Mr. Lilley: At the same time as supporting the post office network, we have always believed in choice. We reaffirmed that in the citizens charter, and I reaffirm it now.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): Has not my right hon. Friend given the many pensioners in my constituency precisely the assurance that they need—that their sub-post office will remain open?

Mr. Lilley: Absolutely. I believe that pensioners will respond with satisfaction to the points that we have made and that they will despise Opposition Members who continue to try to keep a scare going even when the very assurances which they seek have been given.

At the same time as supporting the post office network, we have always believed in choice. We have reaffirmed that in the citizens charter and I reaffirm it now. By contrast, the Labour party has never been the party of choice in this or any other matter. It opposed giving people the option of ACT, and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) today failed to welcome our plans to extend that option to all benefits.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Before my right hon. Friend talks about new products, will he confirm that giro accounts are available for post office customers to collect their benefits and pensions from both Crown post offices and sub-post offices?

Mr. Lilley: That is absolutely right. It is one way that we could all have the best of both worlds—a cheaper, more effective means of delivery which none the less helps to sustain the sub-post office network, brings people into shops, and brings business with it. Although I am not allowed to advertise any private system of distribution, I hope that people in the privacy of the Chamber have heard my point and will transmit it onwards.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: May I make a little progress and then give way to my hon. Friend?

Let me refer to why we are encouraging people to choose automated credit transfer on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Macdonald: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lilley: I have already given way once to the hon. Gentleman.

Colleagues will recall that I announced that we would be continuing to encourage more use of ACT at the end of a very difficult public expenditure survey round. Prior to my uprating statement, there had been widespread fears, fanned by scaremongering from the hon. Member for Garscadden, that I would be unable to keep our pledges to pensioners and families, that I would be unable to uprate benefits for the least well-off, and that I would have to curtail help to victims of the recession. He simply did not understand my priorities. My objective throughout was to maintain existing benefits and secure resources to fulfil modest but very important pledges such as that to introduce our new independent living fund, which has been going through the House of Lords this week.

In my Department, money goes on benefits, on fraud or on operating costs. So savings had to come from fraud and operating costs. I was able to promise my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary and colleagues on the expenditure committee some substantial reductions and savings as a result of reduction in fraud elsewhere, but it could not escape their notice that the biggest single item in my operating costs is the cost of delivering benefits—£650 million a year. Of that, over £100 million is accounted for by order books and giro cheques which are stolen and fraudulently encashed.

Moreover, the cost of paying out of order books is 14 times as great as the cost of payment by ACT. Each payment by order book costs 44p; the same payment into a bank account costs just 3p. In those circumstances, we were bound to continue encouraging people to choose payment into their bank accounts.

If I had passed up the prospect of even modest savings here, could I realistically have asked for more resources for the independent living fund or the social fund, let alone the massive resources that we secured to uprate all benefits? That is why I told the House last November:

"I . . . propose to encourage more customers to accept payment of benefits directly into their bank or building society accounts."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1992; Vol. 213, c. 1015.]

The hon. Member for Garscadden raised no objection then—but of course no scare campaign was being run at the time.

The option to receive payment into bank accounts was introduced for certain payments in 1982. Since then, the proportion of people receiving payment has built up gradually to around 15 per cent. The main source of growth is new claimants, especially new pensioners.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. Friend clarify an issue on which, with respect, I believe we will come unstuck if he does not explain it more clearly? He was asked whether any sub-post office was likely to close. He could not give an assurance about that, because he did not know about bad management, people falling ill or changing their jobs and so on; but he did imply—I think this ought to be clarified—that no sub-post office would close as a result of ACT, meaning that this would be reflected in new contracts. Is that right or wrong?

Mr. Lilley: That is, of course, our intention. All small post offices are currently paid a fixed sum regardless of volume, so people switching to ACT will make no difference to the amount of remuneration that they receive.

People are increasingly accustomed to receiving payment into their bank accounts: 70 per cent. of claimants have bank accounts, and many find payment into their accounts more convenient and safer. It enables them to carry less cash and possibly to earn a bit of interest. Some 35 per cent. of new claimants who have the option of ACT choose it. As new claimants gradually replace existing claimants, the proportion using ACT increases by a little over 1 per cent. a year.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lilley: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but then I must make considerable progress before giving way again.

Mr. Shersby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that last week the Public Accounts Committee criticised the substantial fraud arising from organised criminal activity that has resulted in the substantial losses to which he referred? Would it be possible for ACT payments to be paid into post office savings accounts, which cost the holders nothing but would still enable them to draw their pensions at the post office?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes two good points. First, the Public Accounts Committee has looked at the matter. In 1985, the all-party public accounts committee urged the DSS to encourage people to take their payments of benefits in their accounts, rather than use order books. People can have payments made into their Giro accounts in the Post Office through electronic banking systems. The National Savings bank does not provide that facility. If it did, we would be happy to make use of it.

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: I said that I would make some progress. The hon. Gentleman has intervened once and has spoken for half an hour. If he forgot to make the points that he intended at the time, that is his fault. If he listens, he might learn.

When the option for ACT was introduced, dire warnings were sounded. They have proved unfounded. It may give some comfort to the hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), who did not pursue an alarmist tack, to recall how alarmist his predecessor's fears turned out to be. In 1980, when the proposals for ACT were made to the House, the then hon. Member for Western Isles, Donald Stewart, predicted:

"The Government's proposals would inevitably close down rural post offices."

They would be "disastrous" and "another nail in the coffin of the rural areas".—[*Official Report*, 19 February 1980; Vol. 979, c. 294-297.]

Yet since then, the system has not collapsed.

Although the proportion of people using ACT has been steadily rising, this has not led to a decline in the volume or value of DSS business handled by post offices. On the contrary, the number of DSS payments made through post offices has risen in each of the past three years.

All retailers have faced a tough time during the recession, and sub-post offices are no exception. But the number of closures over the past five years has been less than it was between 1974 and 1979—to pick a period at random.

Mr. Dewar: I do not wish to raise a point that I forgot to make in my speech—I simply want to understand what the Secretary of State has just told the House, because it is of some interest. He seemed to say that, if local sub-post offices lost business because customers shifted to ACT, the system was so constructed that they would not lose any revenue from the DSS. Is that the position?

Mr. Lilley: Small post offices—from memory, there are 2,700— receive a fixed payment, regardless of the number of transactions made through them.

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman cannot understand that, he should resume his seat. I answered the question perfectly clearly and everybody understood the answer.

It is a mistake to suppose that the savings that are made when people switch from order books to ACT arise primarily as a result of the reduced payments to sub-post offices. Sub-post offices are generally lean, efficient family-run businesses. Payments to sub-post offices account for only one quarter of the extra costs. A large part of the extra costs of order books arise within the Benefits Agency itself. Preparing, printing and distributing order books and girocheques costs £200 million. By contract, ACT simply involves our computer transmitting information to the bank's computer at the press of a button.

Fraud and theft are also a significant cost factor—£100 million a year—as well as the contribution that we make to post office counters, overheads, warehousing costs, Crown offices and other overheads. In principle, therefore, we can encourage a shift to ACT, agree to sustain sub-post office incomes despite the reduction in volume and still make substantial savings for the taxpayer.

The major step that we are taking to encourage the use of ACT is simply extending that option to most benefits where it is not yet available. At present, the main benefits for which it is available are pensions and child benefit and disability allowances. This month, we are starting to phase in availability of ACT for unemployment, income support for the unemployed, sickness and invalidity benefit and severe disability allowance. Many people are asking for ACT to be extended. Disabled people in particular often find that it is a convenient way to receive all their benefits. Would Labour Members wish to deny people that?

As many hon. Members have said, we are preparing to redesign the claim forms.

Mr. Graham *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is obvious that the Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Graham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can Labour Back Bench Members quiz the Secretary of State when he will not allow us to intervene?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that it is a matter for the Minister to decide whether to give way.

Mr. Lilley: I have given way to a great number of hon. Members—rather more than did the Opposition spokesman. There is a demand from my colleagues that we make progress.

As colleagues will know, the Benefits Agency ran trials of three variants of a pension claim form that was sent to those approaching pension age. The trials ran for the first 10 days of March. Let me make four things clear. These were trials. As such, their purpose was to enable the Benefits Agency to design a new form in the light of the response to all three specimens. All the forms were clearly headed,

"How you want to be paid?—You can choose".

The new form will mention the Post Office option. In this respect, the new Benefits Agency forms will contrast sharply with the leaflets given to potential claimants by many post offices, which make no mention of any alternative to payment by order books. Indeed, the post office leaflets assert that there is no alternative way of receiving benefits in cash. The child benefit leaflet given to expectant mothers says:

"The only place where you can collect it in cash is your local post office".

Everyone knows that one can get cash from a bank. Perhaps the Sub Postmasters Federation—and, indeed, the hon. Member for Garscadden—should cast a critical eye at these leaflets, which have been distributed by thousands of post offices to thousands of benefit claimants over many months, before getting too concerned about 8,000 copies of a trial leaflet issued over 10 days.

As well as revising our forms, we are also looking at ways of making order books more fraud proof. A new type of order book will be introduced this summer which, through improved design and some new technical features, will, I hope, stop some of the cheats in their tracks.

The clear assurances that I have given to postmasters and pensioners could not be more robust. They are in line with our long-standing policy and reflect our sound Conservative principles. I have shown that the shameless scaremongering over the past few weeks has been without foundation. It is monstrous to exploit the vulnerability of sick, needy and elderly people by whipping up groundless fears. It is time for the mischief to stop. The federation should withdraw its misleading leaflet forthwith and the Labour party should withdraw its scaremongering motion at once.

4.48 pm

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): The debate is not about choice. The rent-a-mob that we heard earlier made it plain where they stood. The same rent-a-mob shouted down Opposition Members on the privatisation of water, the poll tax, education and law and order. Everything that Labour Members said, the rent-a-mob condemned. The debate is not about choices; it is about money. The Secretary of State could be accused of being economical with the truth. It was clear from his speech that the proposals are not about choice, but about money that his Department hopes to save and then squander.

It is not about choice, but about the Secretary of State getting his sticky fingers caught in the till. If he wants to do something to give people choice, why does he not give choice to people in receipt of benefits who want the benefits to be dealt with at source, so that some of them can go to housing departments as payment for rent and council tax?

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): We all agree that choice is paramount in this matter. Does my hon. Friend agree that there can be real choice only if information is available? If the information about bank charges and the possibility that there will be fewer banks and post offices throughout the country is not made available to people, ACT offers no real choice.

Mr. Redmond: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Perhaps she should spend an hour or two explaining her views in a little more detail to the Secretary of State. I am not sure whether she would make any impression.

The stubborn and greedy way in which the Government have behaved since 1979 has meant that people do not trust what they say and, because of that, they are rightly sceptical about what is proposed. It is not about choice, but about money.

I come from a mixed urban and rural constituency in which the village post office plays an important role. I have received hundreds of letters about the proposals to stop payments at post offices. The Secretary of State may shake his head all he likes, but he has not convinced the Opposition about his intentions. I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster, Central (Sir H. Walker) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) have also received many hundreds of letters.

If the Secretary of State wants to keep village post offices open and viable, he should withdraw the proposals. The village post office is a vital part of the community. The Secretary of State is not giving people choice. Public transport has been taken away from the people of rural villages, so if the post office closes the local people will not be able to hop on a bus into Doncaster. They will suffer as a consequence. The Government should give people the choice of using public transport, if the post offices are to close. It is clear that the proposal is not about choice, but about money.

The message from the people who live in my patch to the Secretary of State is that he should get his sticky fingers out of the post offices and let people continue to draw their benefits. OAPs are the most vulnerable people in our society. The Opposition are not scaremongering. The Government want to close village post offices and they are not giving people the right information.

In view of Madam Speaker's request, I will close on that point. I hope that the Secretry of State will take note of the many hundreds of letters sent from my constituency and others across the country.

4.33 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I usually listen to the speeches of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) with great care and interest. I believe him to be an intelligent man who makes interesting speeches. However, he has done his reputation

no good by the way in which he moved this motion. He was not prepared to address many of the sensible points made by my hon. Friends in their interventions.

If people who live in rural areas such as Shrewsbury and Atcham, where there are 120 villages and a county town, and who care for and use their sub-post offices had listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech, they might have been inclined to think that he was genuine in his concern for the future of sub-post offices. They would no doubt contrast that with the fact that, when in government, the Labour party closed more sub-post offices than can be imagined. The Labour party was so concerned about sub-post offices that they were not mentioned once in the party's election manifesto. The tears shed by the Opposition this afternoon were plainly crocodile tears.

Mr. Hain: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the sub-post office in Great Stukeley closed recently? If the Prime Minister cannot even keep his local post office open, what prospect is there for the other 10,000 rural post offices that the Government are threatening?

Mr. Conway: I am staggered that the hon. Gentleman should even think that the Prime Minister would act in a gerrymandering way in his constituency. That may be the practice of the Labour party when in government in awarding contracts, but it is not the way in which Conservative Prime Ministers behave.

The debate has been termed a "scaremongering" one. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an effective speech this afternoon, despite a clearly well-organised barracking tactic on the Opposition Benches. It did not put him off because he has a strong case to put to the House. That is why so many Opposition Members tried to stop him delivering it.

We accept that politics and life in this Chamber are not for the squeamish. None of us should be in this place unless we are prepared to take a bit of knockabout. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can more than cope with it. However, the scaremongering among pensioners displeases me immensely and is to the shame of those involved in politics.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Our case has been given a great deal of force by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters, which is not known to be a natural ally of the working class and the Labour party. Does the hon. Gentleman realise that he is insulting sub-postmasters? Is he saying that their anxieties are not genuine and that they are merely scaremongering? I do not understand how the hon. Gentleman can draw that conclusion.

Mr. Conway: I can explain to the hon. Gentleman exactly what happened. There are two reasons why the campaign came about. First, as my right hon. Friend said, the contract has been renegotiated. People rightly put pressure on the Government when they are negotiating a contract. All is fair in that. Secondly, in the recent county council election campaign, some sub-postmasters, including those in my constituency, were conned into believing that politicians interested in their own future were expressing a genuine interest rather than seeking to use sub-postmasters as part of a party political campaign.

Yesterday I had a word with the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who is an honourable and decent man. He promised yesterday something which I know that he will deliver.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It is on the Board.

Mr. Conway: I am assured that it is on the Board. I am grateful for that. It is a petition of 3,000 names gathered at sub-post office counters in the Rea valley in my constituency. I have spoken to the sub-postmasters involved. They had no idea that they were being used as part of a Liberal campaigning tactic. They thought that the petition was a genuine expression of interest in their concern.

When it was pointed out that the petitions were being distributed in the middle of a county council election campaign and that they should perhaps encourage people to write to their Member of Parliament rather than be conned by the Liberal party, the sub-postmasters said that they would have nothing to do with the petition. They stopped putting the petition on their counters. They are honourable and decent men trying to make a sensible living. They do not want to be used by political parties in a scaremongering campaign to garner a few cheap votes out of frightened pensioners during the county council elections.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Conway: No. I wish to make progress because many hon. Members wish to speak.

Was the campaign genuine? Having looked at the leaflet, I thought that it could have been clearer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained to the House the point of the 8,000 trial leaflets. They were issued over a period of 10 days. The trial did not go on for months. It was precisely that—a trial to find out how the public responded. My right hon. Friend has had a clear response.

Mr. Dewar *rose*—

Mr. Conway: I give way to the hon. Member for Garscadden, although he was not prepared to give way to me on the several occasions when I tried to intervene in his speech.

Mr. Dewar: I gave way rather generously to a wide variety of life on the Conservative Benches. Will the hon. Gentleman consider one point? We had a great deal of argument of mixed value from the Secretary of State, but we did not receive an assurance that if and when a redesigned form is produced, it will refer specifically in the part dealing with choice to all the options available. Does he join me in hoping that we shall receive such an assurance and that we shall rule out the possibility that the choice of the post office will not be specifically referred to on the form? He seemed to hint that that would be unsatisfactory.

Mr. Conway: I cannot speak for my right hon. Friend, but my understanding is that, when the new forms are sent out, the public will be left in no doubt that choice is to continue. We shall see in tomorrow's *Official Report* whether that is the case. On the question of choice, there has never been any doubt in the minds of the Government or of other Conservative Members. The campaign that was

[Mr. Conway]

mounted by Labour and Liberal candidates in the local elections was intended to frighten pensioners by making them believe that they would cease to have a choice.

Mr. Davidson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Conway: If all the interventions are not to be counted against my time, I shall happily give way. In this regard, I seek the protection of the Chair.

Mr. Davidson: There have been no recent local government elections in Scotland, yet in that part of the world there has been a sustained campaign against the Government's proposals for sub-post offices. The thrust of the campaign was not concerned solely with the local elections. The hon. Gentleman does great injustice to the many people who have signed petitions and written letters if he assumes that they are allowing themselves to be used by the Labour party or by the Liberals.

Mr. Conway: The hon. Gentleman has misconstrued my remarks. The hundreds of pensioners who have written to me are not party political dupes. I am talking about people who have sent letters in their own hand, not about people who have been prompted by a campaign involving photocopies and pro formas, which count for nothing among hon. Members. People have been falsely scared into thinking that the Government intend to take action which, in fact, has never been in their minds.

It has been made clear by my right hon. Friend, as it has been made clear in interviews and press releases, that the Government never intended to remove the option to use post offices, rather then banks and building societies, for the purpose of obtaining cash. As so many rural constituencies are represented by Conservative Members, no Conservative Government would be daft enough to take such action.

Indeed, the scaremongering campaign will blow up in the faces of the Labour and Liberal parties. As we found in the "Jennifer's ear" incident during the general election campaign, one can run a scare campaign but one must ensure that there is an element of truth in it. This debate will make it clear to the people who have written to me and to those who follow the proceedings of the House that there is not a kernel of truth in the scare campaigns that the Labour and Liberal parties have been running. The general public will turn on the members of those parties for that abuse.

My right hon. Friend gave the House three pledges today. He said that the Conservative Government are pledged to maintain sub-post offices. That pledge was given in our manifesto, but it was not mentioned by the Labour party or in the speech of its principal spokesman today. My right hon. Friend's second pledge concerned the need to maintain sub-post offices. The Government accept that it is necessary to continue services that are provided so efficiently. My right hon. Friend's third pledge was that the Government would continue to pay for retention and that they would ensure that the block payment was provided regardless of the volume of credit transfers.

It is most important to ensure that choice is maintained. This is a matter of which the Government have at no stage in their consideration lost sight. The Opposition spokesman's opening speech today will have served my right hon. Friend and other Conservative Members very well. We should be able to demonstrate to our constituents that they have been conned by the Opposition. When people are made aware of the facts, what the Opposition parties are doing will backfire on them, as they deserve.

5.3 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me this early opportunity to do what the Prime Minister would no doubt describe as "breaking my duck".

As is traditional, I should like to begin by recalling the sad circumstances of my election to the House. In February of this year, my predecessor, Judith Chaplin, tragically and very suddenly died after what had appeared to be a routine and successful minor operation. Her death was a great loss not only to the House, and particularly to her many close friends here, but also to all of us in west Berkshire. I do not think that anyone doubted that she was a woman of immense ability. Indeed, she was believed on all sides to be destined for high office. For her parliamentary career to be cut short after only 10 months was indeed a tragedy.

Sadly, just one week after he had given the oration at Judith's memorial service, her predecessor, Sir Michael McNair-Wilson, also died. He too will be long remembered with great affection by many in this House, as well as by all of us who knew him in west Berkshire. He had many friends and, so far as I know, not a single enemy, even among those who, like myself, were his political opponents. But, above all, we shall remember him for his immense courage after his health failed him. He not only remained a Member of the House while on kidney dialysis, but fought and won in a further general election. It is a great sadness that he enjoyed less than a year of retirement before he too died.

Both my predecessors were admired greatly as first-class, hard-working constituency MPs. As I said in my acceptance speech, they will be a very hard double act to follow. The constituency that they have passed on to me covers almost half of the area of Berkshire. Although it is dominated by the two largest towns—Newbury and Thatcham—nearly half the population live in the town of Hungerford, in the larger villages such as Lambourn, Compton, Mortimer and Burghfield Common, or in the smaller villages and outlying settlements spread across the rural area. With the M4 cutting across the constituency from west to east, we lie in the now somewhat tarnished silicon valley, with high-tech industries providing a large share of local employment. We are also, of course, famous for our racing stables, particularly in Lambourn and West Ilsley.

Many hon. Members will, for one reason or another, have had cause to visit our beautiful constituency during the past few weeks. Indeed, there was a time when we saw so much of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Malone) that I began to wonder whether he was looking for a home in the area. It is, of course, no surprise to me that people should wish to visit west Berkshire, a very large proportion of which is designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty, but I suppose that it is only fair to say that, of the two principal tourists who visited us from Somerset recently, one—the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who often sits in the seat that I have temporarily occupied today—got a rather better reception than the other.

It is because so large a proportion of our population live in the rural area that I particularly wished to speak in this debate. Over the past few weeks, hon. Members on both sides of the House have found their mail bags full —as I have done—of letters pleading for the retention of rural sub-post offices. Indeed, if the Secretary of State has done anything for post offices recently, it is perhaps that many extra stamps have been sold to pensioners who have written to their Members of Parliament on this subject.

But it is not just a matter of letters. As I went round my constituency during the recent by-election, I was struck by how often this issue was raised on the doorstep. As we all know, rural sub-post offices are often housed in the village shop, and thousands upon thousands of our village shops are dependent on their post office income for survival.

Let me illustrate briefly how important these village shops are for life in rural areas by telling the House about what one village postmistress said to me only a week or two ago. She told me about the lady who comes into her shop almost every day, takes just one or two items off the shelves, and then waits to pay. After a while, the attendant at the till motions to the lady, to indicate that it is her turn to pay, but, in reply, the lady stands back and motions others to go ahead of her.

At first the postmistress could not understand why the lady should act in this way, but eventually it dawned on her that the lady comes into the shop not merely to buy her daily rations but also because the shop is her sole meeting point for contact with her fellow human beings. She lives on her own—a lonely existence, without relatives around her—and her contact with humanity consists of her daily visit to her village shop-cum-post office, where she always waits at the end of the queue, listening to the village gossip.

For all too many people, the village shop is now the only escape from their well of loneliness. If we lose such shops, we shall lose a vital ingredient of the quality of life in rural areas.

Let there be no doubt that the sub-post office system is vital to the survival of village shops. I have long since lost count of the number of letters that I have received, mainly from elderly people, but also from those in receipt of various other benefits as well. They have all stated that their local post office is now the only remaining place in the village where they can obtain cash. The banks have mostly long since closed their village branches.

If the post offices close as well, the only option will be a trip into town. It may sound easy, but it is not when people have to rely on public transport because they are too old or too disabled to have a car of their own. Public transport has more or less disappeared from most rural villages. Even when a bus is available, many people have written of how a trip into town to draw their pension will cost them more in bus fares than the total increase in their pensions this year.

Of course I understand that the Secretary of State intends to leave it to the individual to choose between payment through a bank and payment through a post office, but that is not the choice that people want—a real choice for them means choosing between paying through a bank in the town or paying through the post office in their local village. That choice is under threat today.

I understand that the Secretary of State wishes to reduce the taxpayers' subsidy to rural post offices, but surely hon. Members should take a wider view. Yes, we can save the taxpayer money by reducing the subsidy to rural post offices, but what about the far greater cost to the taxpayer of the extra traffic on the roads as more and more people have to drive their cars into towns? What about the cost of car parks, petrol and environmental pollution?

The overall cost to the community caused by the loss of the sub-post office system will be far greater than any possible savings. Let all hon. Members join to save village sub-post offices, not by merely giving a vague pledge—such as the Secretary of State gave about some national network—but by giving a specific pledge that the number of sub-post offices will not be further reduced. A small, but important, aspect of our country is in danger. It is our duty to save it before it is gone for ever. I therefore urge hon. Members to vote for the motion, not for the Government's amendment.

5.12 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): It is a great pleasure for me to follow the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). He was generous in his warm tribute to the late Judith Chaplin and Sir Michael McNair-Wilson. If he is half as good a Member as they were, as I am sure he will be, he will be a worthy successor to them. On behalf of my hon. Friends, I thank him for his kind words in memory of our two colleagues.

It is hard to believe that the hon. Member for Newbury has been here but two weeks, as he spoke with the fluency of an experienced Member of Parliament. His description of Newbury, to which I have yet to make a visit, makes it sound almost as beautiful as Brigg and Cleethorpes. I should advise the hon. Gentleman that I had the dubious privilege of visiting Eastbourne three years ago, but following that visit, Ministers thought it wise for me to stay well away from Newbury—although it did not seem to make any difference.

I do not know for how long the hon. Gentleman will be a Member of the House. It may be three years, perhaps it will be four—who knows? If there has to be a Liberal Member for Newbury, there is no doubt that the hon. Gentleman, with his local knowledge and experience as a councillor, will ensure that the constituency could not be better served. I wish him a happy and enjoyable time as a Member of Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the issue of sub-post offices in his constituency. I understand and empathise with many of his comments, as my constituency of Brigg and Cleethorpes has a large number of sub-post offices, both in the town of Cleethorpes and in rural areas. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State this afternoon gave the reassurance that the hon. Gentleman's constituents were seeking when he campaigned during the by-election.

The robust speech this afternoon of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has laid the ghost. The Labour party raised the fears for party political purposes, as did the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters to some extent. I understand—as my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway) said —that negotiations are taking place between sub-postmasters and the Government. It is inevitable—I make no particular complaint about it—that exaggeration sometimes occurs in such negotiations, and there has been some exaggeration in the current negotiations. We must bear in mind the fact that the first duty of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security when

[Mr. Michael Brown]

dispersing the huge Government budget over which he presides is to ensure that that budget is distributed directly to the claimants.

I am concerned to learn that the total cost of transferring from the taxpayer to my mother and father —who are both old-age pensioners—and all the other pensioners and claimants on various benefits paid by the Department, is £475 million a year. I believe that every penny that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State raises should go to the claimants for whom it is intended.

We can have a separate debate in the House under the umbrella of the Department of Trade and Industry on whether the Government and Parliament, for reasons of social and rural policy, want to assist in ensuring that the structure of the sub-post office service is maintained. That is a matter on which Parliament, the House of Commons and the Government can rightly hold a view.

In the Budget debate earlier this year, I called for cuts in public expenditure—or if not cuts, for the necessary funds to meet that public expenditure. I want all the money —or as near as possible all the money—in the massive budget over which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State presides, to go to my mother and father and all the other claimants. I am worried when I see that £475 million of the money available for distribution to pensioners has to be spent on transferring the funds from the Government to the claimant.

I made a calculation earlier today——

Mr. Connarty: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I shall make my point and then give way.

My mother and father are 65 and 67 respectively, and are both pensioners. They both receive their pensions directly into their bank accounts, in arrears, every 13 weeks. That means that there are eight transactions per year for my mother and father—four for my father and four for my mother. To make the transfer payments from the state for my parents' old age pensions costs the state 24p for all the transactions.

My mother and father could, instead, each walk the two and a half miles from the village of Crossbush in West Sussex where they live to the town of Arundel. Everyone says that sub-post offices are right on the doorstep of every claimant. That is largely true, but a great number of people have to walk a long way to their local post offices.

According to my calculations, if my mother and father were to elect to take their pension books and walk the two and a half miles each way 52 weeks of the year, on the basis of the figures that the Department has given me of 44p per transaction, it would cost 44p, times 52, times two—to account for my mother and father—a total of, I think, £45·76. If the Secretary of State went to my mother and told her that she could have an additional £45·76 over and above the Christmas bonus in return for having her pension paid directly into her bank, I am sure that she, like many other pensioners, would consider that good value for money.

I have made it clear that it is certainly right that sub-post offices should be part of our social and rural policy. I am satisfied from what my right hon. Friend said this afternoon that this is an extension of choice. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) says that he agrees with choice, so let us not forget that, until 12 May of this year, there was no choice for the payment of certain benefits—invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance, sickness benefit, income support and unemployment benefit. None of those could be paid into bank accounts, so there was no choice. Now there is. The new regulations, in short, introduced more choice.

Mr. Connarty: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has been able to secure his parents' future to the extent that they can go without their pensions for 13 weeks at a time, as they are paid in arrears. Will he ponder the fact that it is not possible to transmit money around the country at no cost? He might care to consider the massive cost of the disability living allowance shambles that the Government instigated by trying to put the system on one computer.

Where does the hon. Gentleman get the idea that any Opposition Member has suggested any element of compulsion? The worries began when people saw that the forms did not list post offices as an option, and thought that they would be compelled to use the banking method.

Mr. Brown: I readily acknowledge that many pensioners want a weekly benefit in cash. There is no problem for them. We do not seek to change that, as my right hon. Friend made clear this afternoon. Let the message go out to pensioners who want to receive their pensions in weekly cash from post offices that they will be able to do so, just as they have done in the past.

The hon. Gentleman says that the Opposition do not want to restrict choice, and the Opposition drew attention to the leaflets that the Post Office is putting out in which it appears to deny choice. I have with me a post office leaflet, issued by Post Office Counters, relating to child benefit. I also have a leaflet about pensions. Both leaflets make it clear that drawing the money could be done only through post offices—there was no other choice.

Because of the sheer quantity of cash sloshing around the country, £100 million is lost to fraud. I support anything that we can do to ensure that that money finds its way into the hands of genuine claimants.

Pensioners can relax. They should realise that the Government simply want to ensure that as much as possible of the £475 million now used for administration and transfer costs gets to the claimant. Reducing the public expenditure deficit must be our first priority, as I said during the debate on the Budget.

The hon. Member for Garscadden has some questions to answer. Perhaps one of his colleagues will answer them at the end of this debate. The Opposition have a duty to tell the House whether they would prefer cuts in benefits or cuts in costs. My right hon. Friend seeks cuts in administration costs so that there is no question of cuts in benefits. We are talking only of increases in benefits.

As recently as 23 April, the hon. Member for Garscadden said that he wanted to root out fraud. He claimed that he was anxious to get rid of any fraud in the system. My right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Department are merely anxious to draw attention to the benefits of ACT so as to get rid of fraud——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I am conscious of having gone on longer than I had intended. Hon. Members know that I give way generously, but I think that I really ought to conclude.

To quote the Foreign Secretary, there has been a great deal of froth and bubble about this subject. In Lincolnshire, we would say that there has been a lot of candy floss; indeed, in north Lincolnshire we call this sort of event a great stitheram. That is what we have had from the Opposition today. The Secretary of State clearly said that claimants who want to claim cash from local post offices will be able to continue to do so. I ask the House to bear in mind the massive cost of transferring limited resources from the state to claimants, and to compare that with the savings that can be made through the ACT system.

5.26 pm

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): On behalf of the Opposition and in particular of the alternative Bench on which I sit, I too congratulate the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on his speech.

I am amazed by the attitude of the Secretary of State. The first time this matter was raised was 8 March, when I tabled an early-day motion 1539 about it. I did that before the campaign began, and before Newbury and the county council elections. It was even before the postmasters themselves had begun their campaign.

I raised the matter in the first place because constituents had complained to me about the possible closure not of rural post offices but of post offices in my urban area, where 11 sub-postmasters and mistresses administer pensions for the Secretary of State. This followed the pilot scheme in which 24,000 new pensioners in the north-west were sent certain forms. Those forms were loaded so as not to offer the post office system as an option. No wonder then that there was a problem or that people were suspicious. Given the Secretary of State's record——

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Surely, if there has been any scaremongering, it was started by the forms sent out by the Government. They offered no choice, so people thought that they would have no choice. That is why we have had hundreds of personal, handwritten letters from people who are worried about losing their post offices.

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is right, of course. *[Interruption.]* I see that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) is waving a leaflet: he is wide of the mark. My hon. Friend correctly states that the complaints started to roll in because of the wording of the Secretary of State's leaflet, not because of the subsequent campaign.

The Secretary of State should think for a moment not about pensioners who take their pensions three months in arrears but about those who go to post offices to collect their pensions with their groceries. He should think about those pensioners who are watched over by the sub-postmaster. In my area, if someone has not called for his pension by about 4 o'clock, the sub-postmaster sends somebody round to find out what is wrong and whether the old gentleman or lady is ill and needs to be looked after. Sub-post offices offer such social services.

I know that it is trite and that it has been said more times than "level playing field", but the trouble with Conservative Members is that they understand the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Nothing was ever truer. I would accept as a reasonable argument the possible saving of £500 million if the Ministers who advance it were not putting out glossy leaflets every five minutes. Hon. Members have all received from Departments glossy excuses for Government policy. More money is spent on publicity by Departments than on administration. The Secretary of State smiles. I must have touched a nerve. Most of the publications are sent out to excuse mistakes and to try to brainwash people into believing that the Government know what they are doing.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): My hon. Friend and I are neighbours in the north-west and were at the receiving end of the concern over the form that did not make it clear that the post office was an option. Judging from the petitions that I have received, hundreds of people have been panicked into opting for ACT because they thought that they had to. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State should give those people the facility to switch back to post offices?

Mr. Lewis: I was coming to that, because it is the nub of the argument. It is said that there will be choice and that some pensioners will accept ACT as a reasonable way to do business. However, the heat that has been generated on the issue will drive people into expense that will arise from collecting their dues. That is because many people cannot afford to have bank accounts. My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) is right. There will be a haemorrhage of customers who would not normally choose to leave the post office.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the matter affects urban areas. In my constituency it affects Ainsworth, Whitefield, Prestwich and Radcliffe. Whatever has happened in the past, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Secretary of State has made it as clear as crystal that all our constituents, including the old and the disabled, will now have the ability to take benefits in cash if that is what they want?

Mr. Lewis: That is hardly the point. Before the debate closes at 7 o'clock, the Secretary of State should say that sub-post offices will remain intact and that the current negotiations will ensure that any diminution in pensions business will not result in any reduction in the income of sub-post offices, thereby forcing closures. The Secretary of State skirted around that question. He was challenged several times and did not see fit to answer in the way that I and my hon. Friends want.

The Secretary of State should speak to his colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry about another threat. In my area the privatised electricity company, Norweb, is now ending a trial of cards that can be used on meters. One sub-post office that I know will lose £5,000 in revenue when that trial ends. The problems are caused by regulation and by Secretaries of State not understanding what is happening on the ground. It would be useful if that threat to sub-post offices were included in ministerial discussions.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): My hon. Friend speaks about cards for slot meters. Such devices undermine post offices and show the Government's dogmatic intention to destroy some sacred cows. The debate clearly shows that, whatever the short-term effects, long term, post office services will be undermined at that level and that will creep through to every level.

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is right. That issue has been adequately covered by me and in some interventions.

[Mr. Lewis]

I remind Conservative Members of what the Prime Minister said when he was selling the objectives of his citizens charter. He said that services to suit the customer would always be provided. I want to see services provided for the customers who need to use post offices not just to collect their pensions but for the social reasons that I have outlined. My hon. Friends agree on that. Sub-post offices provide a vital public service, and the Government should make it clear that they will discontinue any threat to undermine that service.

5.36 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): I do not want to rehearse the need for sub-post offices because the arguments have been eloquently put, especially by the new hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), whom I welcome to the House. I am sure that we have all had experience similar to the lady's case that he outlined because, as good constituency Members, we are aware of the fundamental role played by rural and urban sub-post offices in the social milieu of our constituencies.

The Labour party and the Liberal Democrat party have been vociferous in their support for sub-post offices and I look forward to the promises that they will no doubt put in their next manifestos. It will be interesting to see what weasel words are used. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has expressed his continuing commitment to the sub-posts offices and their continued financing.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Lait: No, because I should like to come to the meat of my speech and many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

We are debating post offices that reflect our current society, but we should be examining how they will reflect our future society. That is part of the argument for ACT. More and more retired people will be used to bank accounts and will wish to take their pensions through ACT. That will apply especially to those with occupational pensions. That means that there is likely to be a change anyway in the service that sub-post offices will be required to provide.

We have all received much mail from the elderly and those who are on benefits and wish to retain sub-post offices. I received a letter from two frail elderly ladies whose even more frail elderly brother is in a residential home. They said that they would like to cease visiting the post office to collect income support for their brother. They were frightened about carrying large sums and they were becoming too frail to go to the post office. They asked whether the money could go through their bank account.

It was therefore with enormous pleasure that I was able to reply saying that on 12 May, which was the date of their letter, new regulations had come into force which would allow them to use their bank. That is a measure of the need to change the functions of the post office.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): How many letters did the hon. Lady have in her postbag asking for the cash to be paid directly to a bank account and how many from those asking for the continuation of the right to collect cash from the local post office? The hon. Lady makes one point, but I think that she ignores the far larger case that I am sure has been made in her postbag.

Mrs. Lait: The point that I am making is that there is still a demand for changes in the services that sub-post offices deliver. They should be providing private sector operations. They do not belong to the post office: they are not branches of the post office: they are franchises of the post office. Those post offices should have the opportunity to deliver a much wider range of services.

I suspect that one reason many postmasters and postmistresses reacted so nervously to what happened is that over the past few years they have had a bad time, as have many other businesses. We need to widen the functions and services that they can offer. That is our responsibility, because what happens in post offices is, in many cases, constrained not just by custom but by statute. We need to consider what services post offices can deliver.

I think that all would agree that post offices are providers of cash. They could also be providers of cash from the banks. They could be providers of building society money in villages. They could be providers of tickets for road, rail and entertainment. They could act as reservation centres for such things. It has already been mentioned that they could provide and sell tickets for the national lottery.

The sub-post offices should consider offering—we have a responsibility to ensure that it is possible—the wider range of services that so many people want in order to live the sort of lives that they will expect to live in future. Perhaps we should also think of allowing the post offices a computer link so that money can be transferred with the minimum difficulty and they can offer the speedy and cheap service we are used to in other financial aspects of our lives.

I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies he will be able to offer the assurances that we want so that the rural and sub-post offices can respond to the changing demands of society and can deliver a yet better service to those who wish to use them.

5.42 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): The debate, and certainly the Secretary of State's speech, clearly suggest that the Government's intention is to undermine post office services. The misinformation or lack of information shows the Government's insensitivity to pensioners.

We have heard of a number of instances of people, particularly pensioners and those on benefit, who depend on being able to go to their post offices to receive the money that they require to sustain their life, and in some cases, their families as well.

I was somewhat surprised to hear about 13-week pension arrears. That is not common in the real world where people wait for their pensions to meet the cost week by week of rent, food and so on. Again, that is a measure of how remote the Government are from reality.

It was once said by one of the more reactionary elements on the Conservative Benches that the Government were destroying all of what they refer to as sacred cows, which in their view impeded the progress of private enterprise wherever it might occur. In the process of doing that, there has been no understanding of the value of certain things. As my hon. Friend the Member for

Worsley (Mr. Lewis) said a few moments ago, the Government appear to know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. They have given no thought to the social consequences of the proposal.

I hope that further thought will be given to this matter. I have already received not letters but petitions signed by concerned pensioners. Whether their concerns are grounded is of no consequence. They are concerned, and they have been made concerned by the Government, who failed to inform them properly about their choice, trying to push pensioners into a system that is more complicated than going to a post office. Whether one likes it or not, people of a certain age become less capable in dealing with certain aspects of banking and so on; that should be taken into account by the Government when they make proposals of this kind.

We all know that banks constantly review their charges, and we shall certainly see in the future not a reduction but an increase in those charges. Once pensioners are trapped by the banks, they will have to find additional money for such charges, which will reduce the value of their pensions. That is another factor that the Government should take into account.

Mr. Ainger: I do not know whether my hon. Friend has had an experience similar to one that I had recently in my surgery, when two constituents found that their mortgage interest payments, paid direct from the Department of Social Security into their bank account, had, for various reasons, been delayed. Because they had a series of standing orders, their account went into the red and, as a direct result of mistakes made by the Department of Social Security, they now have to pay substantial bank charges which they cannot afford. Many pensioners are afraid that, if their money is paid directly to the bank, something similar will happen to them.

Mr. Loyden: I too am concerned about that. Experience will show that that will happen. Banks are not perfect organisations. Instead of, as I used to do, paying my landlord or the collector every week when he came to the door, my rent is now paid through the bank, and I have found myself with arrears of £565 because of the time that the transactions have taken. People, particularly the elderly, are worried about problems that might arise from accountancy procedures, and that is something that they can well do without.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Conservative Members spoke about the enormous amounts that are lost to the Treasury through social security fraud, but they made no mention of the even larger amounts that are being lost by the commercial and high street banks through a different kind of fraud at cash tills and via bank cards.

Mr. Loyden: My hon. Friend makes an important point. As I said, banks are not perfect institutions, and that is a good example.

The Government have pursued policies without paying any regard to those who will be affected by them. The House will be well advised to vote against the Government, who should then re-examine the rundown of post offices, not only in the past 10 or 15 years but longer than that. Crown post offices have been closed and substituted by smaller offices, resulting in queues of pensioners. Those queues can be eradicated by reinstating Crown offices, so that people can transact their business in comfort and enjoy the efficiency of which the Post Office is capable. The Post Office code of practice clearly states how business should be conducted.

I hope that the Government will recognise that the post office services should be maintained. This latest development is another step towards undermining the whole post office service.

5.50 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I am the only Ulsterman who is able to be present because Ulster is in the middle of council elections, but I am glad that at least one Ulster voice will be raised on the side of old-age pensioners and others who are deeply concerned.

The remark of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that the majority of pensioners could wait 13 weeks in arrears for their pension was unreal. In another apparition, the hon. Gentleman is parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He ought to visit Northern Ireland to hear what senior citizens there have to say about the Government's proposal. I do not believe that the parents of whom the hon. Gentleman spoke would have walked to the post office; they probably had a car and could have driven there. If they had to visit the post office, they would have visited the bank also. The hon. Gentleman spent a ludicrous amount of time trying to persuade the House that a large number of pensioners would prefer to be paid by ACT.

In Northern Ireland, the sub-post office is part of the cement of the community. It is vital in keeping the community together. We have lost village schools, smaller churches, and the other cement of society. Today, the village and rural sub-post office provides a focus, a place where people can meet and talk and where the needs of pensioners are well known by the sub-postmistress or sub-postmaster. When a pensioner does not arrive to collect his or her pension, the sub-post office staff know that something is wrong and will make inquiries; there is no doubt about that. Many relatives have paid tribute to the staff for the care that the elderly have received as a consequence of their contact with the local sub-post office.

I would have been happy if the Secretary of State had given an unequivocal assurance that things would carry on as in the past, but he did not. He spoke of a viable national network of sub-post offices. I have heard about viable national networks of public transport or railways, but when big finance came to bear, both were axed. I was amazed to hear the Secretary of State say that the best way to save money was by using ACT. He argued with such strength that perhaps overshadowing this debate is an axe over sub-post offices. Anyone who hears this debate will agree.

One hon. Member said that he backed the Government but admitted that the original form could have been clearer. That is where it started—not as a political way of getting at the Government, but with a form which was unclear. After 22 years' membership of the House, I have some experience of large postbags, but no constituency issue has ever brought a bigger one than this issue. I have also been on doorsteps for the council elections. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) is now in his place; he mentioned this point in the

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

local press. At the door, every pensioner has raised the issue and spoken of his or her concern. Their fears should be acknowledged.

It is a question not of scaremongering but of fear. If Members of Parliament and sub-post office officials want to raise the issue, they are entitled to do so. That is not scaremongering against the Government. The Government can put the matter to rest tonight by saying that they will maintain a sub-post office in every community.

The Secretary of State said that, even if trade is taken away from sub-post offices, they will be paid the same grant. Does any right hon. or hon. Member believe that? We are asked to make fools of ourselves and to accept that, as post office business declines, sub-postmasters and mistresses will still be paid the same.

This debate has given the House a valuable opportunity to express the feelings of senior citizens. I am glad that the Government have at least done part of a U-turn. To begin with, they would do nothing, but now they are under pressure. They should face up to it and give an undertaking that they will maintain post offices for the sake of the communities that they serve.

Some hon. Members have argued that pensioners should not carry large sums of money home. A weekly pension is not a large sum of money. I wonder how many of the people who make that argument have ever spent any time with pensioners, who budget not for 13 weeks but for one week. They have the money in their hands to deal only with the needs of the week. It is ridiculous to say that pensioners can budget 13 weeks in arrears.

We should heed the cries of a valuable group of people who have served their day and generation well. The House owes them a copper-fastened assurance so that their fears can be laid to rest.

5.59 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): It is no surprise that on this occasion I fully agree with the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). The hon. Gentleman put his finger on our real worry. Also, it may come as no surprise that I am suspicious when I hear a Conservative Secretary of State assure the House that everything will be all right at the end of the day and that there is no real threat to our sub-post offices because the Government will find ways of helping them out. Over the years, this Government have said, "Don't worry about factories closing down; we'll build others to manufacture different products." I wonder, therefore, why more than 4·5 million people are still unemployed. The Government's assurances appear to have no credibility whatsoever.

The Secretary of State and other Ministers have said on more than one occasion that the purpose of the exercise is to save money. They wrap up that argument with the protection of old-age pensioners from being mugged. I do not know what to say about that argument. As the hon. Member for Antrim, North said, if we gave pensioners more money, mugging might be an attraction, but it is not a sufficient attraction at the moment. The Government shoot themselves in the foot on some occasions. They are something of head bangers, anyway.

If the Government want, for example, to save £50 million, a large percentage of the sum saved will be lost by local post offices, many of which are struggling to keep open. The Secretary of State assured the House that new contracts are being negotiated. He said that post offices will obtain new business from selling national lottery tickets, but everybody else will be selling them too, it seems.

People view their post office with great respect. They believe that it provides a good service in a variety of ways. They do not regard their post office as a glorified betting shop, or as a bookie's runner. If the only option left to post offices is to become glorified betting shops, the Government will have lost the argument. That is not the kind of service that people want, particularly the old, the sick, the disabled and the vulnerable.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Does my hon. Friend agree that we want to preserve choice for the elderly about the way that they collect their pensions? If the Minister is serious about providing choice, does my hon. Friend agree that the forms that the civil service designs should be simple, straightforward and easy to understand? My constituents often complain that civil service forms are complicated and incomprehensible.

Mr. Michie: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. She made that point far better than I could have done. It has been referred to more than once during the debate.

The Secretary of State admits that millions of people do not have bank accounts. Most of them are poor. People with a reasonable job and income usually acquire a bank account, but the poorest and most vulnerable—those who rely absolutely on benefits—do not have bank accounts. There is no reason for them to have bank accounts, for they live each week from hand to mouth.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The very poor and vulnerable are exactly the people who have been targeted during the campaign. It is shameful that the fear has been piled on that their post offices will be closed. Opposition Members have a great opportunity this afternoon to discuss the future of our post offices, but they have not put forward one credible alternative. They have said nothing about the way in which post offices may be able to build up their business. Will the hon. Gentleman draw attention to those services that post offices may be able to provide in the future?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman does so, I remind hon. Members that many of them are hoping to catch my eye and that long interventions do not help.

Mr. Michie: That was a very interesting, if too long, intervention. The hon. Gentleman invites us to enter into negotiations on the closure and the death of some sub-post offices. That is not the role of the Opposition. The hon. Gentleman referred to the future. According to the Government, the future of sub-post offices is safe. But people are worried. We are not scaremongering. This is what ordinary people say. I have never believed that the Government's attempts to save money benefit people such as those who use post office services.

Hon. Members have received thousands of letters from people from all walks of life who are worried about this issue. Many of those who come to our surgeries are worried about it, too. I have had a letter from a constituent who says that since bus deregulation there are no local bus services. She says that she can walk to the post office,

which is not far away, but that if she had to go anywhere else for her pension she would be faced with a problem. Her husband is totally disabled and she has difficulty in walking.

In another letter an 86-year-old says:

"I am 86 years old, housebound with arthritis and poor sight. At present I rely on a friend to collect my pension weekly from the local PO down the road."

The friend may be able to fetch that person's pension from the bank, if it were possible to get clearance from the bank to do so, but this is all hassle which, frankly, that 86-year-old does not want.

Another letter makes a very good point. The writer is disabled; so is her husband. They rely on a home help service, a service that is already stretched. The home help goes to the post office to collect their pension. It is a local post office and a local home help service. The home help would be unable to travel out of that area to the bank —if, again, it was possible to obtain permission from the bank to collect their pension. That is a service that will disappear if local post offices close.

Some people go to the other extreme. I have a letter from a constituent who believes that this is some form of Conservative plot. He calls it old-age cleansing. It appears to be a humorous letter but it contains a serious point. It says:

"As the older generation are now living longer, do you think in order to save money on pensions the Government are embarking on a subtle policy of ethnic cleansing of O.A.P.s. First they put V.A.T. on fuel in order that many may die of hypothermia, then they propose to close local post offices so that we shall have to go further to collect pensions from banks etc and succumb to traffic accidents in the process. Thirdly I hear that they also propose to withdraw the prescription service from local chemist shops so that we may pass on before we can get our tablets."

All the Government's actions over the past decade or so have affected the most vulnerable people in our society; there is no argument about that.

The Government may believe that saving money is much more important than providing services. They may believe that it is not important that the most vulnerable people in our society have the services and care that they require, providing the economics are acceptable. However, we care. However humorous Conservative Members may find it, we shall continue to fight and raise the issue of injustice to the poor whenever the opportunity arises.

6.9 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I do not represent a rural constituency, but I too have received many letters from pensioners who are worried about the future of local post offices. I believe that the people who have expressed such concern to me can take genuine comfort from the Secretary of State's statement this afternoon in which he pledged himself to ensure that we continue to have a viable network of sub-post offices. He also underlined the fact that pensioners will be able to continue to draw their pensions from the local post office if they wish.

I take issue with some of the remarks made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), who rather dismissed the notion of "cost saving". We should examine the issue closely because the delivery of Department of Social Security benefits costs about £650 million, of which just over half goes to the Post Office and a fraction to sub-post offices. The rest—about £300 million—goes in administration and fraud.

I cannot justify a system which costs that much to administer and loses that much in fraud. Every £1 that is spent on administration or lost in fraud means £1 less available for benefits. I can fight for an efficient system which ensures that social security money goes to those who should receive it, but I cannot fight for a system which costs too much to administer. Therefore, I do not take administration costs and fraud as lightly as the hon. Member for Heeley.

Mr. Ainger: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, especially on the issue of administration costs. Does not she accept that many of the administration costs are paid direct to the sub-post offices for the work that they carry out? It does not square with the Secretary of State's assurance that he will continue to support sub-post offices while at the same time making massive cuts in the administration. One cannot have one without the other.

Mrs. Knight: The sum of money that goes to sub-post offices is fairly small, as I am sure the Minister will emphasise later.

The Post Office is treated with great respect. Costs should be kept to a minimum, but there is a need to ensure that we have a network of post offices, not only because some 35 per cent. of pensioners still wish to draw their money in cash but because post offices are the hub of so many local communities.

However, one must recognise that a change is taking place. More people have bank accounts and building society accounts and pay for goods by cheque. We must ensure that there is a choice. Increasingly, pensioners, choosing not to collect their pensions in cash but to collect them from the bank. Therefore, the amount of money going through local post offices is declining, as it the frequency with which people visit them. We need to examine the issue, therefore from a wider viewpoint to discover whether the role of post offices can be enhanced.

The letters that I receive mention various services that constituents want to receive from their local post offices. That applies not only to rural post offices but to those in the suburbs of towns such as those in my constituency. Post offices must be allowed to conduct more and different types of business.

I have three suggestions. First, only some post offices are allowed to issue vehicle licences. That task is essentially limited to Crown post offices and a few others. Ilkeston in my constituency has about 35,000 inhabitants but only two post offices that will issue motor vehicle tax discs. One is the old Crown post office, near which it is impossible to park, and the other is a small office tucked away on one side of the town and very difficult to find.

Local people organised a petition, which I supported, asking for another post office to become a motor vehicle licensing office. The regional manager said that he could allow only a certain number of vehicle licensing offices in the area, and only two were allowed for Ilkeston. I took the matter up with the Department of Transport, which could not help me. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider allowing more post offices to offer such a valuable service, because it is one that people want, and it would bring more business to post offices.

My second suggestion has already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait). We should enable post offices to offer additional financial services. My local sub-post masters certainly wish to be

[Mrs. Knight]

able to do so. An estate agency can be an outlet for a building society, and I believe that sub-post offices should also be allowed to provide that service.

I understand that there is some confusion about what they can and cannot offer in the way of financial services. One of my local post offices has a contract which states that it cannot offer any financial service which could be deemed to compete with its Post Office duties. That regulation should be examined, because post offices want to increase their financial services, which would bring in more people and increase their viability.

I also make a plea for post offices to be able to sell tickets for buses, the railway, theatres and the national lottery. I do not knock the national lottery as Opposition members have done because it will be popular. Allowing post offices to sell such tickets will enhance the range of services which they offer.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Is it not clear from what my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) have said that we are talking about a sustainable future for all post offices—opening them up to allow them to provide more services for the elderly and others in our villages and towns? The Labour party wants to fossilise the Post Office and make its running costs burdensome to the very people we want to help.

Mrs. Knight: My hon. Friend makes the point well. We seek to provide even more valuable services for the community, so that more people will go to the post offices, thus allowing a diversification of business so that they can meet the changing requirements of the people whom they serve.

Mr. Hain: I welcome the hon. Lady's contribution, but the person responsible for blocking the ability of local post offices to provide that additional range of services is the Under-Secretary of State for Technology. The Government should change their policy. In some local village post offices, such as that in my home village of Resolven, about 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. of business —if not more—comes from benefits. If that were taken away, or even a slice of it, they would be forced to close.

Mrs. Knight: I am trying to make it clear that I seek to enhance the role of post offices, not limit it to the traditional duties which they have undertaken. I am sure that the Minister will deal admirably with that topic when he winds up the debate.

Mr. Connarty: Does the hon. Lady not accept that those are the policies in the Labour party manifesto, which Conservative Ministers have refused for years to adopt? They refused to adopt those policies when my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) suggested them in a recent Adjournment debate.

Mrs. Knight: The Labour party made no mention whatever in its manifesto of maintaining the viability of the sub-post office network. In this debate, too, the Labour party has missed all its opportunities to support post offices and to say how they should develop and provide more services to their local communities. I am sorry that the Labour party has missed those opportunities.

My third suggestion is the result of a conversation with the excellent manager of the sub-post office at Ockbrook, in my constituency, who told me about the various charges that are made when people pay water, gas and electricity bills. Apparently people can pay their water bill at the post office in cash or by cheque at a cost of 15p—less than the cost of a stamp to send a cheque to the company.

However, anyone who wishes to pay his gas or electricity bill at the post office can do so only in cash, at a cost of 80p. The water authority has provided an excellent service for people who wish to pay their bills in that way, and I am urging my local gas and electricity companies to do a similar deal, so that their bills can be paid in the same way through the local post office. I am sure that my hon. Friends, too, will urge their local electricity, gas and water companies to make the same arrangments as the water company in my constituency.

I understand that some of the matters that I have raised are not within the jurisdiction either of the Secretary of State for Social Security or of the Under-Secretary of State for Technology, but I hope that they will consider carefully the matters for which they are responsible, so that we can maintain the valuable service to the local community, and our post offices can be fostered and allowed to develop in a way that benefits the changing society in which we all live.

6.21 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudon): I am glad that the debate is taking place and I congratulate Opposition Front-Bench Members on selecting the subject. Whatever our views are, whatever we may say, and whatever the Government may say about the rights and wrongs and the motives involved—whether the forms were badly designed either deliberately or carelessly, whether there was any intention of hoodwinking old-age pensioners, or whether the Government attempted to protect them—pensioners and those who look after their interests will ensure that what is said in the debate is dispatched to the post offices and sub-post offices so that people can chat among themselves and make up their own minds. That is the essence of a democratic structure.

When that has happened it will be interesting to find our whether we receive another load of letters from pensioners expressing their views about whether the debate was necessary and about what we may have unmasked or uncovered. Like most hon. Members, I have received letters and petitions directly from old-age pensioners in my constituency—280 of them, in fact. They are not mass-printed petitions that people can easily sign; most of them are handwritten letters from people who are not terrified but who are genuinely and honestly concerned.

They are articulate, too. We do our pensioners a disservice if we think that they cannot articulate their own case or make up their own minds, or assess whether there is threat to their sub-post offices.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to a survey done in my constituency by the Blackburn and district branch of Age Concern? It was initiated by Councillor Kevin Durkin and was published today in the *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*. Of the 150 pensioners interviewed, 93 per cent. received their pensions in cash at their post office and none of them said that he or she wanted to change to a different method

of payment. Does my hon. Friend agree with one of the pensioners interviewed, who said that the Government's plan was the daftest idea since the poll tax?

Mr. McKelvey: I totally and unequivocally agree with those sentiments.

There are 19 sub-post offices in my constituency. That may not sound a lot, in view of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) has more than 80 in his constituency. The scale of the problem of closure will vary from one constituency to another. Perhaps I can best illustrate the problem by describing the village in which I live, outside Kilmarnock.

As one comes into the village there is a church, a small supermarket, a newsagent, a fish and chip shop, a Chinese carry-out shop, a masonic lodge and social club and a bowling club with a social club. We also have three pubs, another newsagent, a garage, a garage showroom and a resident Member of Parliament. What more could anybody want? That may not be the idyllic village scene depicted in the Hovis advertisement, but it is a viable village and at the moment we can sustain that viability and variety.

By the way, I missed out the bookie, but that was because his establishment is next door to a vacant shop which used to be the bank. When the banks in Kilmarnock started to close what they called their satellite stations in the villages, every village got up a petition and tried to persuade them to change their minds. But the banks said that because of economies of scale, because of the difficulties of the recession, and because robberies were taking place in the village banks, they had to withdraw the facilities.

The withdrawal of banking facilities created difficulties for those who used bank accounts, even if their pensions were paid into the bank. Because people could no longer go into the banks to withdraw their money—or to deposit money, for that matter—they had to travel to Kilmarnock to do their banking if they did not have a post office account. That often meant that they then spent their money in Kilmarnock. The economy of Kilmarnock is not suffering because of that, but the viability of the village is and the whole community is beginning to suffer because of the lack of a bank. Even the bookmaker complained to me about that.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): I wonder whether, when the Minister replies to the debate, he will define viability. I should like to know where my hon. Friend's post office and the 33 post offices in my constituency fit into the viable national network that has been mentioned. So far as I can see, it will not include the vast majority of the post offices in my constituency and probably not the post office in my hon. Friend's constituency, either.

Mr. McKelvey: The total income of the sub-post office in my village is derived from payments of benefits and from selling stamps and perhaps the odd birthday card. It has not diversified into haberdashery or anything else of that nature, nor is it licensed to sell spirits and cigarettes. All those facilities are already available in the village. The post office does not have to put a petrol pump outside and diversify into selling petrol, as post offices in some rural villages may do. I do not see how my post office can diversify into any areas, other than the sale of lottery tickets, without taking trade away from existing outlets in the village.

Mr. Connarty: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McKelvey: I am sorry, but I running out of time and I know that the Front-Bench spokesmen want to start winding up as soon as possible. If any hon. Member who has sat here throughout the debate has not yet had the opportunity to intervene, I would gladly let him or her in, but I shall not give way to anyone who has already spoken.

As I have said, I have received 280 personal letters from elderly people. I have chosen one of those letters to read to the House, not because it is terrifically articulate, but because it is typical of the representations that I have received and expresses an attitude that I completely understand. It was not written in panic, either. My constituent writes:

"As a pensioner I say 'Hands off the Sub Post Office.' We cannot afford bank charges or the inconvenience of banks. Also we cannot take our pensions in arrears or once a month because we simply could not afford to live. This is another nail in the coffin of freedom."

Freedom of choice is the important thing. The letter concludes:

"I and thousands of others demand the right as to how our pension is paid."

If Ministers tell us that the right of all pensioners and claimants to draw benefit at the post office will be protected, the debate will have done a tremendous service. We shall have gone some way at least to allaying the fears of pensioners about the threat that they face and the fears of those who work in sub-post offices about their future. I look forward to hearing from the Minister that he will safeguard the incomes of the sub-post offices and, more important, that pensioners will be able to continue, as of right, to draw their pensions as they wish to draw them.

6.30 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on his gracious and thoughtful references to his two predecessors. I am sure that their friends and the whole House will appreciate the content and the tone of his remarks. We look forward to hearing further from him in future.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on the debate that he initiated the other night and thank all the hon. Members who spoke in that debate, during which we heard some telling rebukes to the Government from the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) about the quality of the forms about which we have heard so much today. On that occasion, the House was treated to the remarkable spectacle of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs presenting himself in this context as the latest in a long line of caring liberals. I fear that the transformation is not complete, but we live in hope.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie). I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudon (Mr. McKelvey). I am concerned lest my hon. Friend should decide to take up residence at the bookie's or in the masonic lodge, although I recognise that some of these matters are ordered differently north of the border.

The Government's wish to switch payments of pensions and benefits to banks and building societies has been made crystal clear in today's debate. It is part of their planned

[Mr. Jim Cousins]

intention and has been set out in the Secretary of State's speech today and in the Department's report to the House in the public expenditure statement last autumn.

I fear that it is also clear that the full facts of the matter have not been heard. Much has been made of a comparison of transaction costs—3p through banks and building societies and 44p through post offices. Will the Minister confirm, however, that half the pensions processed by post offices in Britain bear a direct handling charge to those post offices of less than 12p and that the comparisons that have been drawn tonight are wholly inaccurate?

May I also draw the attention of the House to the fact that, in addition to the transaction costs to the Government which have been made the subject of the comparisons, there are transaction costs to the people receiving pensions and benefits? It is crystal clear that, if payments are transferred to banks and building societies, hidden transaction costs will be borne by those who use those banks and building societies to process their pensions and benefit claims. That significant factor has not been brought into the equation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) made the point clearly: what the Secretary of State said did not amount to a clear statement that a fairly and equally weighted choice will be given to future pension and benefits claimants. We have heard only that the existing, thoroughly rigged, choice may be withdrawn. The Government must give the assurance that pensioners will have a full and fair choice of payment methods and a guarantee that the advantages and disadvantages of each payment method will be fairly spelt out. It is simply not right that future pensioners—many of whom will not have bank accounts—should be confronted by forms telling them that banks have interest-bearing accounts without similarly pointing out that bank accounts can incur charges. The present comparison is not fair and it is not right to put it before pensioners and benefit claimants.

The Secretary of State says that he believes that the issue is not of great significance, because sub-post offices are paid a flat rate fee. His remarks were published, although not in quotation marks, in today's edition of *The Times* and he made the point again during the debate.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that that is a wholly misleading and untrue statement? It is simply not the case that sub-post offices are paid on a flat-rate basis. They are paid on the basis of transaction unit payments which vary according to the number of transactions that take place. It is true that, to secure the viability of some of the very small sub-post offices, a minimum payment is made, but that is entirely different from the flat-rate payment that the Secretary of State clearly stated was the basis of payment to sub-post offices. It is not.

I should be grateful to be informed, if the facts can be presented, what Ministers think that minimum payment is. I shall cheerfully give way so that they can inform the House what order of advantage is given to the barely 10 per cent. of post offices that receive it. I repeat that it is not a flat-rate payment but a minimum payment. I should be delighted to hear what the Government think that payment actually is. We look forward to enlightenment on that point, on which for the moment there is total silence. The Secretary of State should recognise that he has totally misled the House about the method of payment to post offices. He may regard that as a matter of no great significance, but the sub-post offices, which will be informed about the debate and which anxiously await its outcome, will certainly bear it in mind.

The Post Office operates an internal cross-subsidy arrangement that is weighted in favour of the smaller post offices. That has been a feature of cross-subsidy within the Post Office's accounts since the Liberal Government of 1908. The future of the smallest 7,500 sub-post offices, which do only 6 per cent. of the total volume of the Post Office's pensions and benefits business, depends vitally upon that system of weighted payments.

It would be a tremendous advantage to those involved, many of whose businesses are in great difficulty because of the current difficult economic circumstances, to be given a clear statement from the Government tonight to the effect that that system of cross-subsidy, on which they and their predecessors have depended since 1908, will continue to be a feature of the Government's policy towards sub-post offices. If the Government cannot guarantee the continuation of that transaction unit cross-subsidy, they cannot secure the future of the network and all their assurances and manifesto promises about their guarantee of a universal service and network of post offices are unreal and worthless.

The 20,000 sub-post offices know that, and they are looking to the Government to clarify the point tonight. Without that cross-subsidy and system of weighted payments, the whole viability of the post office network will be brought into doubt.

It might suit the Government if the 5,000 small post officers referred to by the chief executive of the Post Office went out of existence. If the network was truncated in that way, it is possible that the Post Office Counters Ltd. network would be easier to sell off. However, the Government must recognise that an enormous amount of political good will, economic good will and social good will would be lost if that were to happen.

What does the universal service network, which the Government say that they have in their manifesto, promise? What does it mean? At the moment, 60 per cent. of urban and rural parishes contain a post office. Does the commitment to a universal service network mean that 60 per cent. of urban and rural parishes will continue to have the benefit of a sub-post office?

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that people believe that the threat is serious? That is evidenced by the fact that, in Bristol, 1,141 signatures were appended to a petition in three days last week in Redcliffe post office. Is not it significant that, while the majority of the people who signed that petition and who use that post office reside in my constituency, the post office itself is in the constituency of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave)? There may be implications for the citizens charter in relation to the element of the freedom of choice.

Mr. Cousins: I confirm what my hon. Friend said and that experience is repeated around the country. However, I regret to say that, with longer experience of the House, my hon. Friend will find that turkeys do vote for Christmas and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster may be one of them.

Forty-one per cent. of the business of the sub-post office network is accounted for by pension and benefits payments. The undermining of that financial commitment undermines the viability of the whole network.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North was right to be concerned about the position in Northern Ireland because half the business of sub-post offices in Northern Ireland comprises pension and benefits payments. That is the highest proportion in the United Kingdom. I hope that hon. Members from Northern Ireland will take these matters fully into account when they consider how to vote tonight and how to vote in the future when such matters are considered.

Much has been made of opening up the sub-post office network for other kinds of business. This is a Government of deregulation. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) can rest assured in the knowledge that none of us would have doubts about opening up the sub-post office network to wider commercial business and allocating it that task. However, we are waiting for the conclusion of the Government's review of the Post Office which has taken far too long and no proceedings of which have been reported back to the House or the other place.

Furthermore, the Department of Trade and Industry is capable of misunderstanding popular feeling. It misjudged the reaction to the closure of 31 pits and the sacking of 30,000 miners. I have bad news for the DTI tonight. Post office surveys indicate that the smallest 5,000 post offices employ 25,000 people. We have an issue before us—the viability of the smaller sub-post offices—which is as dramatic in its employment consequences as the closure of the coal mines.

The post offices have been rocked by the recession, but their business has held up better than that of the banks and building societies to which the Government want to send the business. The reduction in the number of bank and building society branches has been proceeding far faster than the reduction in the number of sub-post offices. The post office network is larger, more robust and more resilient than the network of bank and building society branches. It would be wrong for the Government, through their decision about the method of pension and benefits payments, to rig the market in favour of the banks and building societies and against the interests of the post offices.

The Government do not appreciate the fact that when we talk about sub-post offices, we are talking about self-employed people. We are talking about people who run small businesses. The Government talk about privatising the Post Office. The fact is that the bulk of the counters network is privatised already. One thing that could be said with great advantage tonight is that the Government will withdraw their proposals to privatise the counters network. The Government could justify their U-turn readily by saying that it is already privatised. That is a wonderful get-out for the Government. The door is open and we would all welcome them going through it.

However, the Government have already today chosen to make war on the sub-post offices—[HON. MEMBERS: "Nonsense."] The remarks of Conservative Members carry a clear message. References have been made to Timex and to picket lines and the sub-post offices have been brought into that setting. That message will go out to the sub-post offices.

Like many of the people they serve, sub-post offices live from week to week. They are small businesses that provide a community service and they are trying to continue in the face of difficult economic circumstances. They will be looking to the results of this debate. From the reaction of the people they serve, they know that the people of this country value them and wish them to be protected. If the Government take any other course, they will rue the day that they set out on it.

6.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): If I may, I would like to begin by referring to the excellent maiden speech of the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). The whole House enjoyed his speech, which was a classic of its type in its lyrical description of a constituency which the hon. Gentleman loves and where he lives. We on the Conservative Benches were very grateful for his very kind comments about Judith Chaplin and Sir Michael McNair-Wilson, who were obviously very valued colleagues of ours.

We welcome the hon. Member for Newbury to the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) said, we do not know whether it will be for three or four years, but we welcome the hon. Gentleman to the House and we welcome his comments today.

I am glad to have the opportunity to reinforce the message that we are absolutely committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices.

Mr. Ainger: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: I have hardly started, so I can hardly give way. I will explain what I mean in a moment.

The Conservative party is the only party with an election manifesto commitment to maintaining such a network, and we have made it clear on many occasions in the House and subsequently that we will stick by it. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway), the first Conservative Back Bencher to speak in the debate, and it was repeated by every Conservative Back Bencher to speak after him.

Mr. Ainger: The Minister, the Secretary of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs are all current or past members of the No Turning Back group. Page 14 of the group's document, "Choice and Responsibility—the Enabling State", states:

"The post office monopoly can no longer be justified."

Does the Minister still hold that view?

Mr. Leigh: Actually, members of the No Turning Back group are in the majority on the Government Front Bench. We are never bound by pamphlets that we wrote in our youth, I assure the hon. Gentleman.

I say to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) that I and my colleagues in the Government are well aware of the vital importance of post offices in our rural and urban local communities. I point out to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) that I have 78 post offices within my constituency, although sadly not one in my own village. There are no pubs or clubs, but, as the hon. Gentleman said, there is a Member of Parliament, and that is probably good enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) made it clear that sub-post offices are an

[Mr. Leigh]

integral part of rural and urban life, and we will keep them. I reassure the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) that the Government remain absolutely committed to maintaining the nationwide network of post offices.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) asked us what we mean by that commitment. I mean a service that is readily accessible by everyone and to everyone in town and country alike. That does not and cannot mean that no post office will ever close—that would be absurd. People move to different areas; they change their shopping patterns. The network has to be kept sufficiently flexible to adapt to those changes. As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made clear when in July he announced his review of the Post Office, that commitment is non-negotiable; it is in our manifesto, and ours is the only party with such a commitment in its manifesto.

Mr. Hain: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No; I have insufficient time.

We have been debating the important issue of the payment of pensions and other benefits by automated credit transfer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already explained why our policy is to encourage—I underline that word—more beneficiaries to have their benefits paid by ACT on a voluntary basis. I do not propose to repeat what he has said. However, I emphasise to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) that my colleagues and I well understand the importance of social security work to sub-post offices. It represents, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) said, at least 30 per cent. of all Post Office Counters' turnover, rising to as much as 50 per cent. in some smaller rural offices.

What has not been fully understood this afternoon is that the option of direct payment into bank accounts has been available for at least 10 years. Therefore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes said in his north Lincolnshire dialect, this has really been a great stitheram about nothing, because that option has existed for 10 years.

Mr. Dewar: I want to be helpful and I hope that I shall get a clear answer from the Minister. Will he guarantee that in any future forms that are issued, on which people will nominate how they will get payment of their pensions, there will be a clear commitment to equal treatment of all options—in other words, that there will be no question of the Post Office disappearing into an addendum or disappearing off the main part of the form?

Mr. Leigh: I give a commitment that their right to take up their pensions with the Post Office will be clearly stated, as indeed it was stated in the forms that we are talking about.

ACT is an option that has gradually been taken up by pensioners and others, yet total Government business transacted through post offices has in fact increased during each of the past three years, in spite of increased use of ACT. We do not now expect any sudden increase in the numbers making use of ACT. I say to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun that experience over the past decade simply does not bear out fears about the future of post offices of the kind that have been expressed today by the Opposition.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear only yesterday, pensioners will continue to be able to receive pensions from most post offices. It is not Government policy to remove the right of pensioners to receive their pensions from the Post Office. I hope that that is an unequivocal statement: it is clear, the Prime Minister made it yesterday, and I have repeated it today. We are encouraging people, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said—we have been encouraging them for many years—to receive their benefits through their bank accounts, but only on a voluntary basis. I will take no lessons from Opposition Members about the importance of choice. We have always been the party of choice, and, as the party of the citizens charter, we will remain so. We are extending a choice of payment method——

Mr. Connarty: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No, I will not give way.

We are extending a choice of payment method to those receiving all types of DSS benefit; we are not restricting that choice. To suggest otherwise is misleading scaremongering, and we have had plenty of scaremongering today and in the weeks leading up to this debate.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Leigh: I had better not, if my hon. Friend will allow me, as I have only six minutes left. I must reply to the points that have been made.

Concern has been expressed today and during recent weeks about the trial that was recently undertaken to test —I emphasise that word—three different forms on 24,000 new pensioners. My right hon. Friend has already spoken in some detail about the trial. The trial—I stress that it is only a trial—is merely to test the impact of the different methods of presentation. The aim is to provide information about the advantages to customers of the ACT option, which are not yet widely understood, and to encourage take-up of that method on a voluntary basis.

Some hon. Members have today expressed their concern about the way in which the payment options have been presented in some of the trial forms. Let me therefore add a word of reassurance that the Benefits Agency, which is responsible for the administration of benefits, will take full account of hon. Members' comments on that point.

First, our commitment to a nationwide network is not negotiable, whether the Post Office's future lies in the public or private sector. Secondly, there is no link whatever between the encouragement of ACT and our review of the structure and organisation of the Post Office. Thirdly, our policy is to encourage ACT. That policy will not endanger the nationwide network, including the rural network. I say to the hon. Members for Antrim, North and for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie) that we will continue to give pensioners a choice in how their pensions are paid.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central raised questions about the Post Office review. I can assure hon. Members that the review is being undertaken with no preconceptions as to its outcome and it is looking at both private and public sector options. It is Labour Members who are frightened of ideas. All new ideas in their hands have turned out to be vote losers.

The Opposition have suggested today that there is a link between privatisation of the Post Office, encouragement of ACT, and post office closures. I find it hard to follow their argument. If, as they claim, we are trying to fatten up the Post Office for privatisation, why should we wish to encourage ACT at all? Surely, if fattening up the Post Office was our intention, we would be trying to minimise ACT payments so that the Post Office would get more and more of that work. If we were seeking only to maximise the Post Office's profits in preparation for privatisation, why should we be making repeated assurances about maintaining the nationwide network, including the rural offices which are the least profitable?

I say to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) that we have an open mind on privatisation. Opposition Members have a closed mind. We look at private and public sector options. Opposition Members consider only public sector options. Of course, the Labour party predicted disaster for customer services before every privatisation. "No privatised company would ever bother looking after the customer," the Labour party said. "All that it would be interested in would be profits." Labour got it wrong in every privatisation. We have only to look at British Telecom and the investment that has gone into the network to know that.

The Labour party's refusal even to consider the benefits that privatisation might bring the Post Office is an indication of a deeper malaise in the Labour party. Labour Members have a dinosaur-like conservatism which would allow the Post Office to ossify—shackled by unavoidable public sector constraints, unable to compete effectively in a changing world. They would condemn the Post Office to a slow decline, as they would have condemned all the other nationalised industries. Of course, they have opposed every nationalisation.

We have heard a lot of nonsense today about ACT. It was a Labour Minister, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), who, about 15 years ago—perhaps he will listen to this—said:

"I am expecting a report by the end of the month . . . I am in favour of the principle"—

of payment direct into pensioners' bank accounts—

"and the introduction of such an arrangement would cover child benefit as well as retirement pensions . . . I hope to make some progress in the near future."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1979; Vol. 963, c. 1078.]

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Leigh: No, I must finish my remarks.

That was a Labour Minister about 15 years ago, saying that he would welcome progress to ACT.

I say to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central that I am surprised that he has not protested that his constituents are charged by the Labour council when they pay their council tax at their post offices. In central Newcastle, the council expects—it even demands of—people to pay the council tax at the local housing office, and if it is paid at a post office a charge is made. What kind of choice is that in Labour's heartland?

Mr. Cousins: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leigh: No; the hon. Gentleman has had his chance.

Labour's scaremongering about the Post Office was as wrong 10 years ago as it is today. It was wrong at the time of the privatisation of British Telecom, and wrong on every other privatisation. Labour was wrong yesterday, is wrong today and no doubt will be wrong tomorrow. Labour says that it is opposed to closures, but it has closed more post offices than we ever did. Labour says that it favours a national network of post offices, yet ours is the only party that is committed to it. Labour says that it favours investment, yet it has opposed any discussion of the options that would result in private investment to improve the service.

Labour says that it cares about pensioners. Why does it indulge in scaremongering? Labour says that it favours choice. Why does it deride our commitment to choice? We will give new opportunities to our small post offices. They will be allowed to compete for national lottery work and we will consider giving them further opportunities in financial services, bill payments and ticket sales. Other interesting ideas have been raised and considered in the course of our review, all of which Labour has opposed.

We have raised the standard for choice, investment and free enterprise. The existence of all 19,000 privately run sub-post offices is a tribute to the spirit of entrepreneurship which we wish to foster and which the Opposition despise. We want those businesses to grow and expand—to be providers of valued services in villages and towns—and we will continue to offer them that opportunity. We will continue to offer all our pensioners the right to choose between the bank and the post office for payment of their pensions.

That is our commitment—to choice, to investment and to the Post Office. I urge my hon. Friends to reject this absurd motion.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 311.

Division No. 275] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Callaghan, Jim
Adams, Mrs Irene	Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Ainger, Nick	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Allen, Graham	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Alton, David	Canavan, Dennis
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*	Cann, Jamie
Armstrong, Hilary	Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Chisholm, Malcolm
Ashton, Joe	Clapham, Michael
Austin-Walker, John	Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Barnes, Harry	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Barron, Kevin	Clelland, David
Battle, John	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Bayley, Hugh	Coffey, Ann
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret	Cohen, Harry
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Connarty, Michael
Bennett, Andrew F.	Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Benton, Joe	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Corbett, Robin
Berry, Dr. Roger	Corbyn, Jeremy
Betts, Clive	Corston, Ms Jean
Blair, Tony	Cousins, Jim
Blunkett, David	Cryer, Bob
Boyce, Jimmy	Cummings, John
Boyes, Roland	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Bradley, Keith	Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*	Dafis, Cynog
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Darling, Alistair
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Davidson, Ian
Burden, Richard	Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Byers, Stephen	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Caborn, Richard	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*

Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ilisley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger

Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House endorses Her Majesty's Government's clear commitment to freedom of choice in the means by which social security benefits are paid, while reducing fraud and unnecessary costs by extending the availability of Automated Credit Transfer to all benefits and encouraging people with bank accounts to choose to have benefits paid into their accounts, to the continuation of a national network of post offices and sub-post offices and to securing the efficient and effective delivery of the vital service which the Post Office provides.

Defence Industrial Base

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Madam Speaker has selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I beg to move,

That this House recognises with gratitude the efforts and skills over the years of all workers in the defence industries who have ensured that the United Kingdom's security has been maintained with the best of equipment and weapons; notes that with its laissez faire approach to the reduction in defence orders, Her Majesty's Government now threatens the long term viability of Britain's defence industry; regrets that the Government is now treating defence workers in a callous and cavalier manner, as has been most recently witnessed in the case of Swan Hunter on Tyneside; and calls upon the Government to ensure an adequate package of measures to attract investment and employment to those areas adversely affected and to establish a Defence Diversification Agency as part of a strategy of harnessing all the available skills for the national manufacturing effort.

The Labour party felt that it was necessary to call this debate in time allocated to us, in view of the Government's failure to allow a debate on defence. As the House knows, it has long been a convention that two days each year are allocated to discuss the defence estimates, which permits hon. and right hon. Members to raise a wide variety of issues affecting the defence of Britain. However, the Government have resolutely refused to arrange such a debate, despite repeated requests from Labour Members. One must go back to 1991 to find the previous opportunity for the House to have a general debate on defence.

We all know why the Government have failed to arrange a debate—it is simply that they are in such a mess on defence and dare not face the exposure of their inadequacies in this field. The crisis management approach, which is inevitable once they abandoned the strategy in favour of expediency, has been widely criticised throughout the defence and security field.

The Labour party has made its position clear. At the last general election, our manifesto said that we would

"provide whatever resources are needed for effective defence for our country".

That is clear—there is no hesitation, no calculation and no equivocation.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): How does the hon. Gentleman square that statement with the commitment made at the Labour party conference for £6 billion-worth of cuts and the commitment of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to reduce expenditure to the western European average? Such policies would decimate the defence industry in the United Kingdom, kill jobs in and around my constituency and be an absolute disaster for the industries which the hon. Gentleman says he represents.

Mr. Clark: I had intended to speak only briefly today, but, in view of the hon. Member's inane intervention, I will not do so. Let me take it clear where the Labour party stands. We will provide whatever resources are needed for the effective defence of our country. I hope that Conservative Members can understand that.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Clark: I will not give way, because it will be an inane comment.

When we speak of "whatever resources", we are conscious that it is not sufficient merely to count the number of our armed forces. One must take into account the resources and equipment available to our troops. Those resources and equipment have been among the best in the world, and have been largely produced in British factories. The skill and commmitment have been absolute. One has only to visit our defence factories to appreciate the pride and dedication of the workers. The House and the nation owe a debt of gratitude to our workers in the defence industries.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the Warsaw pact, almost every country in the western world has reduced, or plans to reduce, its defence spending—that is natural—and this Government have been no exception. Even before the round of defence cuts which are currently being planned, Her Majesty's Government have announced cuts of up to 20 per cent. by 1995-96 and a projected further 9 per cent. thereafter.

The Opposition do not quibble with reducing defence spending. We quibble only about how the Government have arrived at their decisions without a defence review. How have they determined to implement the cuts, sweeping aside all moral, social and strategic consequences affecting all those involved in our defence industry?

Since 1990, more than 100,000 workers in defence-related industries have lost their jobs. Men and women who have given years of service have found themselves suddenly dumped on the scrap heap. With their sole reliance on market forces, Her Majesty's Government have not only acted unfairly but put at risk the ability of Britain to supply our own defence needs in the future.

In essence, the Government have taken a laissez-faire approach to the future of our defence industries. Whatever is cheapest in the short run is preferred and damn the consequences. Their strategy towards the defence industry of Britain is little more than industrial Darwinism. Whatever emerges from the free market must be correct and they will worry about tomorrow when the day comes. As a nation, we shall rue the consequences of that policy.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House and the country which shipyard would have been given the landing platform helicopter contract if he had been Secretary of State for Defence?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman has asked a fair question. I shall answer the question because it deserves an answer. Given a difference of £70 million in an order of £210 million, there was no choice but to give the order to Barrow and Govan. I hope that that is sufficiently plain and straight for the hon. Gentleman. I shall deal with the point further later.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: No. I want to make progress, not deal with some fatuous point.

By their position as monopoly buyer, the Government have weakened the industrial base of Britain. That is extremely dangerous. As Gerald Boxall, chairman of Vickers, recently argued crudely:

"You can't go to war without an industrial base."

John Weston, the managing director of British Aerospace—one of Britain's largest companies—put it more diplomatically when describing the defence industrial base. He rightly claimed that it was

"part of the essential make-up of the country's defence posture."

Both were right in their own way.

Nowhere has the problem been seen more clearly than in the case of Swan Hunter on Tyneside, a shipbuilding company with a long tradition of building fine ships which have met the exacting standards of the Royal Navy. There was no mention of its sterling work in the Falklands conflict, when the men worked night and day to ensure that the ships were prepared for the conflict.

Last week, events occurred at Swan Hunter which no one has been able to explain satisfactorily. On the day that it was announced that the helicopter landing ship was to be built at Govan and Barrow, the *Evening Chronicle* in Newcastle ran a dramatic story, supplied by the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), under the banner headline on the front page "Victory", that the ship was to go to Swan Hunter.

Given the Government's view that the Royal Navy should have fewer than 40 surface ships, the hon. Member for Tynemouth cannot have realised that the Government had decided that Swan Hunter was expendable.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): The hon. Gentleman does my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) a great disservice. I can confirm that, between half-past 1 and half-past 2 on that day, which I spent in the company of my hon. Friend, he did not know the outcome of the Ministry of Defence decision. So to blame him for floating that story is utterly unworthy and unfair. The hon. Gentleman should withdraw the accusation.

Dr. Clark: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point. He is right. The hon. Member for Tynemouth did not know what the position was. He would not have made any comments to the press along those lines if he had known.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): It is good of my hon. Friend to explain what happened on that day. He and I had lunch together. I was not aware of the outcome of the decision on the order. I did not advise the *Evening Chronicle* in the way that it reported. What the hon. Gentleman said is not true. I appreciate that he said it on the basis of an inaccurate account in a newspaper. The truth is as explained by my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson).

Dr. Clark: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because, as I notified him, I mentioned him in my speech. I do not suggest for one moment that he knew the outcome. Of course he did not know. That adds to the mystery of the events surrounding the whole tendering process. That is the point that I want to raise tonight.

In view of the background, several pertinent questions need to be answered about the events surrounding the affair. I see that the hon. Member for Tynemouth agrees with me on that point. Those questions can be answered only by an independent inquiry. I am glad that the Defence Select Committee shares my view, and I am delighted that the National Audit Office is now to investigate.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I have made it clear that I wish to complete my speech as quickly as possible.

Many questions arise. How is it that two bids were different to the tune of £70 million out of an order of £210 million? That stretches the imagination. Were the two companies bidding for precisely the same ship? I understand from the hon. Member for Tynemouth, through the north-eastern newspapers, that, in a meeting with him, the Controller the Navy, Admiral Sir Kenneth Eaton, confirmed that the companies were bidding for the same ship.

If Swan Hunter goes under, how will that affect the Government's procurement policy? There will be no warship building yards in Britain capable of building anything larger than a frigate, with the possible exception of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. in Barrow, and that only if massive investment in slipways and cranage was undertaken there.

Mr. Trotter: I noted what the controller said when I asked him about the matter. He said:

"They were two good designs and either was acceptable to the Navy."

He categorically denied that there was anything wrong in the process by which the decision was taken.

Dr. Clark: I am grateful for that intervention. However, to say that either design was acceptable to the Royal Navy is not the same as saying both yards bid for the same type of ship. That is the essence of one of the questions to which we need the answer.

If we have no large warship building capacity, with the possible exception of VSEL, where will our future large naval ships be built? Will they be built in foreign yards? Will they be built in South Korea? Will VSEL be given the monopoly for large ships as well as for submarines? If that is the case, how does the Government's competition policy operate? Furthermore, have the Government no concern about the prospect in strategic terms of not retaining some capacity for large warship building?

Opposition Members believe that we need an answer to such questions. We need an inquiry, not to reopen the bid but to ensure that no mistakes which may or may not have occurred in the tendering procedure are repeated.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: No. I must continue.

There is too much at stake for any mistakes to be repeated. Not only the livelihood of men and women is at stake but the long-term ability of Britain to defend itself.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I must make progress. I am sorry, but I must continue.

Until such an inquiry has reported, many will believe that Her Majesty's Government deliberately and callously set out to deceive all those at Swan Hunter, including the hon. Member for Tynemouth, into believing that it was favourite to win the order when clearly, with an overbid of £70 million, it was never a runner. It is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that the Government had it in for Swan Hunter. How otherwise can one explain a local newspaper headline claiming victory? How otherwise can one explain the Prime Minister's being given credit for the order by none other than the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter)?

Mr. Michael Bates (Langbaurgh): Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr. Clark: No.

Labour believes that we must have more planning in this respect—flexible and viable planning, but nonetheless with a strategy. Like Her Majesty's Government, we have accepted that the amount we spend on defence in the years to come is likely to be reduced. Thereafter, we depart from the Government's approach.

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: No.

Mr. Devlin: It is a very good point.

Dr. Clark: If it were a very good point, it would be unique for the hon. Gentleman.

The Government must show in a tangible manner that they are prepared to provide financial assistance for areas affected by defence industry closures and rundown. The Tyneside offer, for example, is a mere fleabite, bearing in mind the enormity of the problem involved. In south Tyneside, where about 40 per cent. of the work force of Swan Hunter live, there is already male unemployment, according to the Government's own figures, of more than 28 per cent. That does not take into account the 1,100 miners at Westoe colliery, where work stopped just 10 days ago.

We are talking about male unemployment of more than 33 per cent. in a big borough—not a small town—of 150,000 people. That will be the effect. I realise that Conservative Members are not interested in unemployment, especially in the north-east of England. I am dealing with figures not for wards or for towns but for a large travel-to-work area. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may cackle, but the people of this country will agree that an unemployment rate of one in three is unforgivable and that the Government must do something about it.

Mr. Bates: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: As the hon. Gentleman represents a seat in the north-east, I am sorry to say that I cannot give way.

Even the European Community recognises that former defence industry areas may have a problem. Indeed, its own KONVER fund is available. Can the Government give the House an assurance tonight that Britain will avail itself fully of this programme? Will areas such as Tyneside, which are outside the scheme, be brought within it?

I am trying to get across to Ministers a point that they have not yet taken—that we are talking about a situation in which one in three men are out of work. This is not short-term unemployment, but massive long-term unemployment.

Mr. Bates: The hon. Gentleman seems to be basing his defence policy on the *Evening Chronicle*. Given Labour's policy, that is a fairly credible base. Nobody doubts for one minute that unemployment is a tragedy. The hon. Gentleman himself has just said to the House that, given the same criteria and the same bids, he would have made the same decision. That being the case, what does he propose?

Dr. Clark: We need answers to a number of questions about the whole process of tendering. I cannot say what I would have done if I had been the Secretary of State for Defence. Quite clearly there is not available to me anything like as much information as is available to the Government. I shall not bore the House. Surely hon. Members are not so stupid as to fail to understand that the Government have tens of thousands of civil servants, including some of the top contract lawyers in the country, helping them to evaluate contracts.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Like you, Sir, I am well aware of the fact that a standard defence tactic is the firing of chaff in the event of illumination by enemy fire. Is it in order for Conservative Members to use debating chaff to disrupt the development of a genuine theme by the Opposition spokesman? Will you please enable my hon. Friend to speak without interruption so that we may understand the logic, even if Conservative Members are incapable of understanding it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I was in the Royal Air Force, and it seems to me that the Opposition spokesman is a pathfinder. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member, having intervened at least once—perhaps twice—should realise that the hon. Gentleman is not giving way to him.

Dr. Clark: If this is the best that Conservative Members can produce, it will not be very difficult to handle. The Government must take seriously the need to aid areas that are suffering from massive unemployment. These problems will not go away. Labour Members believe that the Government should be more pre-emptive.

It is our belief that Britain needs a defence diversification agency—a body that would ensure that companies in the defence field were assisted with defence conversion work and, where appropriate, helped to diversify into other markets, products and technologies. We accept that this is not an easy remit, but it is one that is worth pursuing.

In spite of attempts by the Government to ridicule the idea, other countries are now adopting this approach. This applies to France, Germany and, most recently of all, the United States of America. Even that high apostle of the free market is not so obsessed as are the Government and Conservative MPs with the free market that is prepared to sacrifice its own indigenous defence industry and the skills of its workers for some short-term financial gain, which will probably cost dear in the long run. Congress has allocated billions of dollars for defence diversification and for the use of dual technology. There is no doubt that the Administration in the United States are aware of the problem and of the challenge. Unlike the British Government, they are prepared to face up to the challenge.

Defence diversification is a runner even at the moment. There is defence diversification in this country. Companies are already involved in the process.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I should like to give way, but I must make some progress.

In Devonport, I saw luxury yachts being built. In Rosyth, I saw London underground trains being refurbished. In Southampton, Vosper Thorneycroft is working on fireproofing techniques for North sea oil platforms. This is admirable. In Weymouth, Ferranti Thompson has adapted its sonar work for seal scaring in Scottish fish farms. Swan Hunter itself has diversified. It

was building the new Tyne ferry and various pontoons. In addition, it had an order book of more than £5 million in general engineering. Firms have diversified.

Furthermore, many local authorities and trade unions, unlike the Government, have accepted the challenge of defence diversification. Much work is being done up and down the country. All this is being achieved despite lack of encouragement from the Government—indeed, at times, despite their discouragement. Imagine what could be achieved if there were an enabling hand.

The innovative skills of the defence industry could be harnessed in the civilian field as well as the military field. There are many opportunities to create dual technologies. If we were to pursue this path, the manufacturing decline that we have seen for the past 14 years might well be reversed. The Government owe it to the defence workers and the country at large to ensure that that happens.

7.40 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'recognises with gratitude the efforts and skills over the years of all workers in the defence industries who have ensured that the United Kingdom's security has been maintained with the best of equipment and weapons; notes that the policy of competition for defence orders adopted by Her Majesty's Government has resulted in an efficient United Kingdom defence industry with world-class export performance; condemns the 25 per cent. defence cuts demanded by the Labour Party Conference which would cripple Britain's armed forces and her defence industry; rejects the idea of a Defence Diversification Agency to second-guess business decisions that should more properly be taken by companies; but welcomes the assistance provided by Her Majesty's Government to help regions to adjust more effectively to major industrial change by creating opportunities for new industries, as exemplified by the wide-ranging package of measures announced last week for Tyneside.'.

The House has just listened to a wildly intemperate and inaccurate speech. As I listened to the feeble attempt of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) to become a rabble rouser for the evening, the words of a famous Labour party icon came into my head. They were used by the great and late Nye Bevan, who once opened a debate in the House by saying that he welcomed the opportunity to prick the bloated bladder of lies with a poniard of truth. That is exactly what I am going to do this evening.

I shall not stray out of order and accuse the hon. Gentleman of outright mendacity, but I have seldom heard a more unconvincing mish-mash of half truths, misrepresentations and fantasies from the *Evening Chronicle*—all washed down by heady draughts of conspiracy theory. I am glad to take on the hon. Gentleman point by point and answer the questions that he has posed.

Tonight's debate is taking place against a background of the sad receivership of Swan Hunter. The feelings of sadness run deep on both sides of the House. Swan Hunter is a proud name and a great yard which has built warships for the Royal Navy to the highest standards for many years. For that company to go into receivership with a potentially large loss of jobs is a human and commercial tragedy which we all deeply regret.

However, according to the words of the Opposition's motion and the flamboyant language of the hon. Member for South Shields, the Opposition seem to want to express not regret, but recrimination. In the motion they accuse us of behaving in a "callous and cavalier" manner towards Swan Hunter. That is a false and baseless charge. I am glad to have a chance to answer it, and the fundamental question: could the Government have done anything to avoid Swan Hunter going into receivership? I am sorry to have to say that the only realistic and responsible answer to that question is no.

We think that the Government acted not only scrupulously fairly, but also as positively and helpfully as they could do in relation to Swan Hunter's helicopter carrier bid. Sadly, the plain truth of the matter is that Swan Hunter's deep-seated financial problems were far too great, and its bid for the LPH was far too high for the Government to be able to take any practical steps that might have helped the company to avoid receivership.

Mr. Frank Cook: What is the Government's intention with regard to the three frigates awaiting completion in the Swan Hunter yard?

Mr. Aitken: Those matters are being discussed by my Department and the receiver, who has already been good enough to describe our attitude to the problem as positive and constructive. We hope that it may be possible to finish the ships in the Swan Hunter yard, but that is a matter for continued negotiation and discussions between the receiver and us.

When bids are more than £50 million apart and the lower bid fully meets the Navy's requirement, no responsible Minister, in the interests of being fair to the taxpayer or the competitive bids, would argue in favour of accepting the higher bid. He would have to be certified to do so. I am glad that the one theme of commonsense that emerged from the hon. Gentleman's speech was that he seemed to recognise that, although it was not recognised by some of his Front Bench colleagues in yesterday's debate.

I recognise that what I have just said is unwelcome news to some hon. Members and some outside commentators who have spoken out so vociferously in understandable sympathy with Swan Hunter in the past few days. But defeat in a major commercial bid competition is often the father of unconvincing excuses and sometimes, as we have seen tonight, even the mother of ridiculous conspiracy theories. I am glad to have this chance to answer, point by point, some of the allegations that have been floated, particularly those made in yesterday's debate by the hon. Member for Newcastle on Tyne, East (Mr. Brown). He made the totally unconvincing charge that Swan Hunter's failure to win the LPH competition was the deliberate fault of the Ministry of Defence.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear last week, the Government were sufficiently concerned earlier this year about the deteriorating financial situation at Swan Hunter to bring forward by several months the LPH bids and their decision on them. We felt that by giving Swan Hunter a fair chance to win the competition we were offering the yard and its employees their best and perhaps only immediate chance to secure their future.

I think that that was well recognised at Swan Hunter. When I visited the yard on 3 March I found that most people with whom I talked, especially the union leaders, recognised that the company had to put in a keenly priced bid to win the contract against what they must have known

[Mr. Aitken]

would be an equally keenly priced bid from their competitor, VSEL, which also had profound employment and other worries.

When the two bids came in, we were surprised, just as others have subsequently been surprised, by the size of the difference between them. It was, as I have already said, a difference in excess of £50 million. However, we were not surprised that VSEL's bid was so low, but that Swan Hunter's bid was so high. The VSEL bid did not surprise us because it came in at about the price which the internal estimates of our experts had suggested would be a fair and proper price for such a ship.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East made a number of fanciful claims in the House yesterday which deserve a rebuttal. First, he suggested that we deliberately changed the specifications to increase Swan Hunter's costs. Let me make it clear that both yards tendered a ship to meet exactly the same specification.

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): The Minister will be aware that one of the concerns is that the yards may have been tendering for two different sorts of ship. Will he comment on the statement made this afternoon by David Smith, the commercial director of Kvaerner Govan, that the company tendered for a commercial vessel, whereas Swan Hunter tendered for a naval vessel?

Mr. Aitken: I shall comment not on the statement as I have not read it, but on the hon. Gentleman's general claim, which is not new. The charge has been made several times in the feverish atmosphere of the past few days. However, I shall first respond to the issues raised by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East.

Some changes were included in the specification issued with the invitation to submit best and final offers. Those changes were, in general, relaxations of the specification. Swan Hunter made some material additions to its bid to meet that relaxed specification, but none would begin to account for the extraordinary gap in price between the two final bids.

There have been claims—such as those just made by the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers)—that Swan Hunter bid for a warship and VSEL bid for a merchant vessel or commercial ship. As I have said, our requirements and specifications were made crystal clear to both companies. We operated on an entirely level playing field. We did not, as some have claimed, ask one company to bid for one sort of ship and the other company to bid for a quite different sort of ship. Although they based their bids on different designs of their choosing, the similarity between the two proposals was remarkable.

The tonnage of both bids was virtually the same, the length of the two designs was the same to within a few metres, and the width or beam of the ships was almost identical. Both companies bid in the knowledge that we required a merchant shipping quality hull rather than a warship quality hull as we have always seen the LPH as a vessel that is likely to stand off from the heat of the land or sea battle protected by a frigate or destroyer escort.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East claimed that VSEL unfairly subsidised its bid. Our shipbuilding experts in the Ministry of Defence were not born yesterday. They were always on the lookout for what is called "buying the contract" by VSEL by cross-subsidies or by unfair underpricing. But we found no evidence of such practices in the VSEL bid, which I emphasise came in at the ballpark level of price which we expected for such a vessel.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My hon. Friend the Minister is being extremely helpful to the House. Will he give the figures for the bids tendered by Swan Hunter and VSEL/Kvaerner Govan in the first round, and in the second—the best and final—round?

Mr. Aitken: For good reason, it is the practice of the Ministry of Defence—at the request of all competitors—not to give detailed, specific figures. We are prepared to supply the figures to the National Audit Office, but for reasons of commercial confidentiality——

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Not good enough.

Mr. Aitken: We have clearly explained the gap between the two bids, and we have not been criticised for giving the broad figure.

Dr. David Clark: The Minister has tried as best he can, given the difficulties with commercial confidentiality, to explain the matter to us. I must ask him, however, whether the difference in the initial bids was as great as he suggests. Was there a considerable difference between the initial bids? When was the final bid actually received?

Mr. Aitken: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the precise date, because it was only a few days—*[Interruption.]* My colleague will give the answer in his reply to the debate, because I do not have the precise date in my head. There was certainly a gap between the original bids and the second bids, but the best and final offers were the ones that counted.

Dr. Clark: The Minister has misunderstood my genuine inquiry. Was there a difference between the bids of the two companies at the initial stage?

Mr. Aitken: There was certainly a difference, which did widen. We do not give the figures, for reasons of commercial confidentiality. The detailed figures that the hon. Gentleman requests should not be given across the Floor of the House, but they will be given, in terms of commercial confidentiality, to the NAO and, if appropriate, to the Select Committee.

Finally, and most conspiratorially of all, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, echoed by the hon. Member for South Shields, told us that my Department had been plotting the downfall of Swan Hunter for some months. That is an absurd accusation, not borne out by the facts that I have given the House.

To return to reality: we evaluated the bids thoroughly against our usual technical and value-for-money criteria. We examined them for omissions or signs that the bidders had under-estimated the complexity of the task of the risks involved. We took our findings on these points into account when reaching our final decision. It was the VSEL bid that fully met our requirements, at the price that we had expected to pay for such a ship, and it was more than £50 million lower than the Swan Hunter bid. In those circumstances, we had no choice but to accept the lower bid.

After saying so much about Swan Hunter, it is only fair to congratulate VSEL on putting in a first-class, highly competitive bid.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): As the Minister has referred directly to me, I am grateful to him for giving way. I understand that, following my speech yesterday, he is under a duty to attack me—but much of what he has said merely confirms what I said then. Will he tell the House whether the AOR1 bid was carefully checked by the Department for cross-subsidy, and whether there was such a large difference between the initial bids of VSEL and Swan Hunter that the Government felt that they had to place the order with the former and could not proceed with Swan Hunter?

Mr. Aitken: I have never heard such a wriggling intervention. I have just blown up every one of the charges that the hon. Gentleman launched last night, and now he says that my speech has confirmed what he said. The AOR1 was a politically directed bid to Harland and Wolff. That did not turn out successfully; it is not comparable with a competition that we evaluated purely on technical and value for money grounds.

My last point on the subject of Swan Hunter is that the Department welcomes the initiative taken by the Select Committee to ask the National Audit Office to review our bid evaluation and selection process. We have nothing to hide in this matter. The bids were carefully evaluated with the integrity and professionalism that we have long come to expect from my Department's sea systems controllerate.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East appears to be repeating the grave slur that the books were cooked or the figures rigged in order to tilt the bid away from Swan Hunter. I hope that he will, in a calmer moment, think of withdrawing the allegation that he made last night. I do not believe that he possesses a shred of evidence to support it.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I will willingly acquit the Government, the Prime Minister and the Minister of the charge of deliberately closing Swan Hunter as a warship building yard if the Minister will now say that the Ministry of Defence is willing to put further warship work into Tyneside.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman is turning himself into a stunt man, which is not like him. I understand his frustrations as a constituency Member—frustrations felt just as keenly by other constituency members. The future of Swan Hunter must depend on its future ownership, about which I can say nothing tonight.

My point is that we welcome the involvement of the National Audit Office. We are glad to supply the factual evidence—it appears of little interest to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen—to the Select Committee and the NAO. That is not a precedent, so it is no use the hon. Member for South Shields trying to claim credit for a breakthrough.

In the past, we have routinely given information on our handling of major procurement projects to the NAO and the Select Committee in commercial confidence, if they have asked for the information. We are perfectly happy to accept this extra dimension of oversight, and we are confident that our judgment will be seen to be right, in the interests of the taxpayer and in the interests of upholding fair play as between competitive bidders.

The hon. Member for South Shields launched an attack that went much wider than just our handling of Swan Hunter. His debate was originally entitled "The destruction of Britain's defence industrial base". Evidently there were some nervous second thoughts and cooler heads prevailed, because the words "destruction of" have been lifted from the title. The thinking behind the motion, however, remains the same.

Judging by the motion and by the hon. Gentleman's dyspeptic undertaker's manner of delivery tonight one might be forgiven for thinking that Britain's defence industry was tottering towards the grave. It is not even a case of

"Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated",

as Mark Twain once said: Britain's defence industrial base, as I shall go on to point out, is thriving in the circumstances.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to diversification in the defence industry, and to the Rosyth dockyard and the overhaul of underground carriages. Was it not the Government's far-sighted vision, when they privatised the dockyard, which gave it that ability? Did not Opposition Members oppose that privatisation?

Mr. Aitken: I thank my hon. Friend for that good point. The consortium that runs the dockyard has been able to diversify splendidly without any help from an expensive Government quango of the sort that the hon. Member for South Shields wants to set up. Business makes these decisions better than advisers in the Government trying to second-guess commercial affairs.

We had better define what Britain's industrial base is. We believe that it includes about 440 United Kingdom-based companies which last year won contracts from the Department worth £1 million or more each. The defence industrial base employs, directly or indirectly, about 500,000 people. It won domestic orders from us worth £8·8 billion, and it won export orders for overseas contracts worth £5·1 billion.

Within an industry of this size and complexity there are bound to be winners and losers, but even in the difficult post-cold war climate, in which defence budgets are diminishing—our own by 10 per cent. over the next three years—a great many British defence companies are not merely surviving but thriving. One reason for that is the boom in exports of defence equipment. Britain's defence exports are a tremendous success story. For the year ended 31 December 1992 Britain achieved defence export orders worth more than £5·1 billion, or 20 per cent. of the world market. Both are record figures. This year we will do even better.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): Would the Minister clarify whether there will be defence cuts of 10 per cent. in the next three years?

Mr. Aitken: I said that the defence budget planned a reduction of 10 per cent. over the next three years——

Dr. Reid: So it will decline by 30 per cent. in the next nine years.

Mr. Aitken: More statistical juggling by the hon. Gentleman. We do not employ Labour's voodoo economics in our party. I know that Opposition Members cannot stand hearing good news, but that is what I am trying to give them.

I was saying that our record-breaking defence exports are no flash in the pan. They are the result of a lot of hard work by British companies and by the Defence Export

[Mr. Aitken]

Services Organisation, and they are greatly to the credit of our competitive procurement approach. We can say proudly that defence exports are rising, have risen and will continue to rise. In 1982, they were worth £1·7 billion, but they are now three times higher at £5·1 billion and we confidently predict another record-breaking year in 1994 and a world market share of even more than 20 per cent.

It is not only our exports that support the defence industry. Domestic procurement is a vital factor, and although it is undeniable that the defence equipment budget is declining in real terms, we remain British industry's biggest single customer.

I am lucky enough to be able to travel all over the country to Britain's defence companies and I enjoy good dialogue with many of them. Since my surprising elevation to the Front Bench last year, I have made about 30 industrial visits to companies and have had more than 50 meetings with company representatives. I simply do not recognise the pessimistic portrait of the defence industrial base painted by the Opposition.

I shall come in a moment to the issue of jobs and diversification, but I urge the House not to make the mistake of believing that the outlook for our defence industry is one of gloom and doom. Many of our defence companies are continuing to do well. They are maintaining their profitability and turnover, winning new business and reshaping their activities to take advantage of their market strengths.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the problems faced by the shipbuilding industry, especially in relation to warships, is that for some reason it has not sold a single new large frigate to any other nation? If shipbuilding followed the example of the rest of the defence industry, all these jobs would not be lost on Tyneside.

Mr. Aitken: I am afraid that my hon. Friend is inaccurate. He is not even close, because we have some successful warship export orders. We have been listening to a litany of woe about shipbuilding, so I shall give some examples of successful companies. Vospers of Southampton has a record order book of £700 million, which has doubled in the past 12 months, and 95 per cent. of that is for export. Vosper employs 2,000 people and plans to recruit another 200 for its present order book. Although it remains a 90 per cent. defence company, it is broadening the base of its business into new markets without any help from Government quangos, such as the diversification agency suggested by the Opposition.

There is plenty of good news in the aerospace sector. The Government's resolute support for the important European fighter aircraft has given work on the development phase to some 300 United Kingdom-based companies. I was not surprised by the big cheer and the warm reception that greeted my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when he visited the aerospace workers of Lancashire at British Aerospace's Warton factory last month, given all that he has done for the EFA and Tornado exports. *[Interruption.]* In the light of the Opposition speeches, one would not think that there was all-party support for the defence industrial base. The party workers may cheer the Prime Minister, but the Opposition spokesman did his best to talk Britain's industry down.

There is also good news for land systems. Only last Thursday I visited the modern and highly efficient production line of one of our major manufacturing companies, GKN Defence at Telford, which makes the world beating Warrior armoured personnel carrier that has served our troops so well in Bosnia. I certainly did not find my GKN hosts wreathed in doom and gloom, but I learned an instructive lesson on jobs.

I said to the engineers working on the production line, "If you win, as I think you will, the £1 billion-plus Kuwait order for Warrior, which we are now negotiating Government to Government, will you take on much more labour?" In effect, the answer was, "Well, perhaps there will be a few more jobs, but not many." I was surprised by that answer but I soon learned how GKN, like so many of our defence companies, is steadily becoming tauter, leaner and more productive, partly at least by engineering labour out of the system through high-tech advances.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My hon. Friend's visit to Shropshire to the GKN plant was greatly welcomed. As he knows, the engine for the Warrior is built in Shrewsbury by Perkins. The Warrior is not only an excellent vehicle but has an excellent engine. On behalf of Shropshire, I thank my hon. Friend not only for his highly successful visit, which was well covered, but for his efforts to help us to sell Warrior. It is a superb vehicle made by a good work force who deeply appreciate the efforts that he and my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade made to keep jobs and businesses in Shropshire.

Mr. Aitken: I thank my hon. Friend for his gracious intervention. I shall repay the compliment by saying that the people in the factory there think that he is a superb parliamentary advocate for their cause, which he is.

Time and again I was shown new equipment which, sadly in human terms, mean that the human element on a factory floor is often diminished. A computer-guided friction welder means, sadly, that fewer human welders are necessary.

Dr. David Clark: We accept that.

Mr. Aitken: I am not sure whether Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen have accepted that, but I am glad to hear it.

Visiting a modern defence company is more like visiting the frontiers of new technology. My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) is in his place. Earlier this month I visited his constituency and saw three of our smaller defence companies which are all at the high-tech end of the business; companies such as Link-Miles, Ricardo Engineers and ECC Simulation, and they are all engaged on high-tech work in computer software.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): My hon. Friend's visit to my constituency was greatly appreciated, and I hope that he found it valuable. I should like to be assured on three matters. First, the costs of bidding for——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman seems to be about to make a speech.

Mr. Stephen: Could the Minister give me an assurance on one matter? I may have an opportunity to speak later in the debate. Will he assure me that the Government will

do all that they can to reduce the cost of bidding for defence contracts, because those costs are becoming an almost impossible burden for medium-sized companies?

Mr. Aitken: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We have embarked on a major contracts review to simplify the procedures, and we have small and medium-sized companies very much in mind.

The Opposition spoke about a defence diversification agency. There is no serious merit in that wonderful wheeze. They say that the Americans do it, but they should look at some of the reactions of the Administration to the initiative that has been lodged. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* had a full-page article—*[Interruption.]* It is better than——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Minister and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen will not engage in semi-private conversations. We should all like to hear what is being said.

Mr. Aitken: I am doing my best to be publicly heard.

There has been criticism of the notion of a magical new formula. I should like to quote no less a figure than the United States Deputy Secretary of Defence, Mr. Bill Perry, who described the record of industrial defence diversification as:

"unblemished by a single success."

The Opposition idea of introducing such unsuccessful projects to our economy is a misguided return to the old days of the national enterprise board.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): The Minister mentioned the firm of Vosper. On Monday, not only did the President of the Board of Trade visit Vosper, but the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire gave the firm the Queen's award for exports. That disproves the assertion that some of our yards are not exporting. A company with a record like that should be supported and in the not too distant future it will look towards the Government.

Mr. Aitken: The diet of good news is too much for the Opposition.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Does my hon. Friend agree that my constituents who work for English Electric Valve would be heartened if the Opposition sought ways to help the Government to persuade the Americans to drop their protectionist policy which prevents image intensifiers being sold to the American Army? That would be better than raising hypothetical cases about a diversification agency in America that does not seem to work properly and, I suspect, never will.

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is right to make the point that, apart from the defence diversification wheeze, we had not a single constructive new idea from the Opposition, only one long whinge.

The debate has marked a new milestone in the Opposition's slide into opportunistic political humbug. The hon. Member for South Shields—CND, retired—represents a party which, let us remember, has voted four years in a row at its annual conference for a 25 per cent. or a £6 billion cut in Britain's defence spending. Now he suddenly proclaims that Britain's defence companies need more orders.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Aitken: No, no more interventions.

What on earth was the flash of light that brought about that conversion? The cause of the U-turn, transforming the hon. Gentleman and a few of his hon. Friends who agree with him into the new military tendency, a party within a party that now opposes reductions in defence spending and proposes extra orders to create employment in defence companies, was that the Government placed a large defence order for a helicopter carrier, fairly and honourably won by a wide margin by VSEL.

In using an Opposition Supply day in this way, the hon. Gentleman has caused some splits and ructions in his party. Perhaps that is why he had to change the title of the debate. But it would be interesting to know where will be the dogs that will not bark tonight from the Opposition Benches. Where will be the voices of Scotland, Clydeside, Barrow and all the other constituencies in which jobs will be created by the LPH order? I do not think that we shall hear them joining the preposterous cry of foul play on the basis of no evidence.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): Many of us hope to contribute to the debate, but because the Minister has been on his feet for so long, many of us will not have the chance to do so.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman has not been backward in speaking in defence debates. During his recent Adjournment debate he talked of the terrible suicide rate in Barrow and the tranquillisers that were needed, all because orders were desperately needed. Now that the region has an order, it might be gracious enough to say what a successful job the Government are doing.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Aitken: No, no more interventions.

I do not believe that in the Labour heartlands people will join in the preposterous cries of foul play that we have heard from the Opposition. They will not believe in the destruction of Britain's industrial base when taxpayers' resources are being so visibly directed to this sector of Britain's manufacturing industry, not just with the LPH order, but with the EFA project, the Challenger project and many other defence projects that I could list.

Not everyone likes the implications of the Opposition motion. I read with great amusement in *The Guardian* last Saturday an interview by Mr. Andrew Rawnsley with that old Nestor of Labour Secretaries of State for Defence, Lord Healey. On the Opposition's defence policies he said:

"We have become very timid. We tag along, we attack every proposal for cutting defence spending for example. Sometimes we attack the Tories for cutting when it is clearly absolutely essential. This for me is one of the tragic legacies of Bennery."

There we have it—Bennery, Clarkery, CND current, CND retired. As Shakespeare said:

"there's small choice in rotten apples."

The rotten apples have given us a rotten motion. It takes no account of the good strong trees that are growing sturdily in Britain's defence industrial base. It takes no account of our £8 billion a year spending on Britain's defence companies. It takes no account of our £1·2 billion market testing programme which offers big new commercial opportunities to Britain's defence companies. It takes no account of our record-breaking export figure of which I have spoken.

No, Britain's defence industrial base is standing up well in the post-cold war climate. We can be proud of it. We can

[Mr. Aitken]

be proud of it's achievements. We can be proud of the Government's support for it. The Opposition have chosen their weapon for this parliamentary duel. They have chosen a boomerang and it will rebound against them. I urge the House to reject this absurd motion.

8.13 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Listening to the spate of self-congratulations coming from the Conservative Benches, one might have thought that we were approaching a general election rather than just having had one. All hon. Members were glad to see the thawing of the cold war. But as the threat of that cold war diminished, other strategies were called for, strategies on forces and on the military supplies to those forces. That is where the Government have been lacking. If my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) seemed like an undertaker, it may have been because he was burying the Government's pretence to have strategies to deal with the new circumstances that come before us now.

Between June 1990 and May 1993, about 55,000 workers in defence industries lost their jobs. A British Aerospace factory near my constituency has, during the past few years, had its work force halved. It is obvious, and it is said throughout the north-west, that once a highly skilled defence engineer is sacked, he seldom reappears in engineering. I should have thought that, given the Government's commitment to the manufacturing industry and the fact that between 1979 and 1993 five jobs in the manufacturing industry in the north-west were reduced to two, there is a need for all the highly trained skills that we have dispensed with and are dispensing with in the former defence industries to transfer to manufacturing.

Other priorities have appeared. When the cold war thawed, the United Nations demands became greater. Demands were created by nationalism in Yugoslavia. There were other United Nations involvements in Cyprus, Angola, Somalia and Bosnia. British troops may not be involved in all those cases, but it is obvious that the United Nations will become more and more involved and more and more troops will be needed. Britain will more and more be called on to provide those troops, not only over a few months, but over many years.

The Government do not appear to have a long-term strategy for that changed situation. It is a difficult problem and it is one to which we must now bend our minds. I listened with interest when I met the British ambassador to the United Nations recently and my feelings are confirmed by his experience, which shows that we must start planning for a situation in which British forces are frequently used as part of a world peace-keeping force.

Military strategy also demands an industrial strategy. The trade unions, which the Government often attack, made clear the position. They said that we require a coherent total approach which first defines defence requirements and secondly ensures that forces can count on adequate manufacturing capacity in Britain. That does not mean that we can manufacture everything that our forces require, but it means that, when we have a tried product, we should look after it.

For example, the British Government failed to intervene positively in Leyland DAF in the way in which the Belgian Government did. A company in my constituency, Edbros Engineering, supplies the bodies for the Leyland DAF trucks which are used by the British Army—the tried four-by-four trucks that are in use in Bosnia. I am saddened to see such a national resource of a tried piece of equipment being thrown into jeopardy because the Government are unwilling, through party dogma, to support the companies that produce that equipment.

I am not asking for subsidies, but I am asking for positive financial help to allow those companies to continue. *[Interruption.]* While Conservative Members may scorn, other Governments and our European partners do not hesitate to give such assistance. Perhaps that is why they have a manufacturing industry while ours is in decline—because our Government will not put the national interest first. Try telling the French, when their industries and jobs are involved, that it is not wise for their Government to intervene. If the Government had intervened a little more, there would be fewer people in the dole queues of Britain today.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): About 100,000 people are employed in defence exports. Can the hon. Gentleman speculate how many jobs would be lost if Labour's policy of further restricting defence exports was introduced?

Mr. Young: I will not hazard a reply, but had we been a little more selective after Iraq, we would not have found ourselves in the position that we did.

I have one constant principle, which is not a Labour party political principle, but comes from having served in the British forces. Nothing is more disheartening to the sailor, soldier or airman than seeing comrades slaughtered by home-produced equipment. If we are cautious about exporting arms, I would have thought that recent history justified that caution.

We need defence and defence forces and Labour has said that it will never leave this country undefended. We have a duty to our service men and women to ensure that they are adequately backed by the equipment that they need. Equally, if particular industries and special skills become redundant—and even with British Aerospace's success with the Eurofighter, it accepts that thousands will still have to be dismissed—there is a duty on the Government to ensure that the skilled work force are retrained and redeployed in manufacturing industry, which we need in the peacetime battle for our economy.

I am not against the concept of competition, but with VSEL and Swan Hunter, Government principles of competition—if "principles" is the right word in that context—have been taken to the extent that Britain now has a monopoly supplier of warships. A monopoly sits ill with the concept of competition.

I argue for a new strategy for the future role of the British forces in the new context in which we find ourselves, and a new industrial strategy for the supply of defence equipment to those forces. It is to be hoped that equipment will come from our own industries. If we need to collaborate with our friends in NATO, we should examine joint products in which British manufacturers could be involved.

When the skills of the British defence industry workers must be dispensed with, there should be a strategy of

retraining and redeployment so that those skills can be adequately used in this country's manufacturing industries, which are the economic lifeblood of the nation.

8.24 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I hope that the House will forgive me if I make an unashamedly constituency speech, because Chelmsford is greatly reliant on defence industries. I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House in his place, because he represents an adjoining constituency and many of his constituents work in the four main companies in Chelmsford that meet many of our armed services' defence requirements.

Chelmsford has traditionally been heavily reliant on defence jobs because it is the home of the Marconi companies—Marconi Communications, Marconi Radar, English Electric Valve Company and Marconi Research. In the past 12 months, we have paid a heavy price in redundancies at three of those companies because of changing world patterns.

Despite jibes made earlier in the debate, nothing is more demoralising or debilitating than people who desperately want to work being out of work. Let no one make the mistake of thinking that the vast majority of registered unemployed are scroungers. They are not—they are desperately seeking to return to work and to use their skills. That is particularly true of those from the defence industries, who are a highly skilled, highly motivated work force who produce defence equipment, as well as communications equipment, for not only this country but others.

Unfortunately, as in other parts of the country and throughout the world, Chelmsford's defence companies have paid a heavy price for two reasons. The first is the ending of the cold war, the dismantling of the Berlin wall and the peace dividend. All nations have been compelled substantially to rethink established defence views and the future of their defence industries. The dramatic ending of the cold war came as a surprise, as did the crumbling of the nations in the eastern block.

Secondly, the worldwide recession has not only meant that United Kingdom companies have been fighting a continuing battle to be competitive, but it has had a knock-on effect on other countries, which have also cut their defence requirements—and because the United Kingdom has such an excellent defence exports record, it has been affected. I am delighted that British industry has responded to that challenge and continues to fight throughout the world for orders for its first-class military products.

It has not escaped the attention of companies in my constituency and in others that there is a need to diversify, so that they have a better balance between military and non-military orders. There has been diversification in companies such as Marconi Communications for several years—even before the ending of the cold war. In the area of civil communications, Marconi Communications supplies high-power and low-power radio and television transmitters to the BBC, IBA and clients worldwide. It sells space communications equipment to British Telecom and Mercury and marine and other equipment that can be used in civil applications but also adapted for the military.

Marconi Communications also sells military communications equipment, such as the Scimitar backpack —although that business is declining because of the situation in this country and worldwide. The company also helps to equip the Royal Navy, the United States navy, Holland and the far east with communications products. There again, the market has contracted because of the changes in our defence requirements.

In anticipation of changes and to break down reliance upon military equipment, a few years ago Marconi Communications began to invest heavily in developing new non-military products—for instance, special vehicle radios for the emergency services: the police, the fire service and the ambulance service—in the use of the old VHF television frequencies for equipment, thus giving large transport organisations direct contact with vehicles on the move, and in special projects, including radio distress signalling for fire brigades, portable space equipment and public telecommunications.

It is slightly odd that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) made no mention of the fact that it was a Labour conference two years ago that supported and voted for a policy that would cut defence spending by £6 billion. If implemented, that policy would mean far more job losses in companies similar to those in my constituency.

If my memory serves me aright, the policy of the Liberal Democrats is to cut defence spending by 50 per cent. over 10 years. That would not bring much comfort to my constituents, certainly to those who work for companies such as Marconi. In my constituency, the Marconi Radar company supplies defence equipment to the Royal Navy. It has had an extremely tough time, but it, too, is seeking to diversify to make up the shortfall on the military side of its business.

English Electric Valve has gone through a difficult time. In February and March last year, English Electric Valve, which produces the third generation image intensifiers—a first-class world product—was saved from having to make substantial redundancies by an order that it won from the Ministry of Defence. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and I, as constituency Members of Parliament, brought to the attention of the Ministry of Defence the fine qualities of that product. I thank the Ministry of Defence for placing that contract with English Electric Valve.

What is particularly galling is that we do not necessarily fight on a level playing field with overseas nations. Through an Act of Congress, the United States Department of Defence forbids companies such as English Electric Valve from tendering to supply the United States Army with image intensifiers. That is wrong.

I raised the matter two years ago with the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement. Through the offices of the British embassy, he kindly raised the matter with and vigorously lobbied the US Government and the Department of Defence on the unfairness of the unlevel playing field. Unfortunately, the Americans refused to budge and change their policy. It is highly protectionist and it is wrong. If there is a first-class product, it should be able to compete worldwide, particularly if the Americans are to compete in our markets.

I pay tribute to the Minister of State for Defence Procurement for the fact that over 90 per cent. of the defence requirements of this country are placed with British companies, which saves British jobs and provides the British armed forces with first-rate equipment. That is

[Mr. Simon Burns]

right and it must continue. It is important that we should look after our own, provided that the product is cost competitive and that its quality is right.

At a time such as this, when companies are having to make a difficult transition, it is important that the Ministry of Defence should place, whenever it is feasible and possible to do so, its orders or its upgradings or maintenance contracts as quickly as is humanly possible with companies so as to encourage them to continue to provide those services. I am sure that the Minister is more than aware of the need to do so and is seeking ways to ensure that that is done.

It is important for us not to get sidetracked by the tantalising but unrealistic suggestion that an agency such as a diversification agency is the panacea for all problems. Industry and commerce, which have their own entrepreneurial flair and leadership, do not want and do not need politicians to interfere and tell them how to run their businesses and how to win orders. It is important that business men, management and the work force should work together, invest heavily in research and development and come up with ideas for products that are viable and relevant to the needs of the market in both the military and non-military spheres. In that way, and by being highly competitive, they will win the orders that will allow the technological trail blazing and frontier busting to continue.

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten in a debate of this nature that the British Government provide help both to defence-related companies and to others that have nothing to do with the defence industry. For example, the Budget provided for export credit guarantees to be extended. That will benefit companies. The Government also support business men when they go overseas and try to get people to buy British.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): So that Opposition Members can understand more fully what my hon. Friend says about diversification, another Marconi company looked at its transponder work for satellite dishes, went into the television side and produced transponders for Alan Sugar's satellite terminals. That was an intriguing diversification. It was not, however, driven by the Government. It was driven by private industry looking for ways to diversify.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has identified another area where the flair of private enterprise and the acumen and intelligence of the boffins can work together to identify something new and exciting to present to the market and, we hope, have a successful launch and then win orders and secure jobs.

We should not forget, either, the help that the Department of Trade and Industry gives by means of changing tack seminars, which encourage companies to build on their excellent skills and technology and develop new business through diversification. Many schemes focus not so much on the large defence companies but on small and medium-sized enterprises, of all natures. The enterprise initiative consultancy scheme provides financial support for consultancy help in designing, marketing and manufacturing systems and business plans and spurs support for products under research. The aim is to help to develop new products and processes, thus pulling research capability towards the marketplace. There are many exciting initiatives to help businesses of all sizes. They should be embraced and used to their nth degree to help businesses.

The KONVER programme was referred to briefly by the hon. Member for South Shields, but he was then diverted from it by an intervention. That scheme was devised by the European Commission. However, because of delays in the Commission notifying member state Governments, the programme is still being discussed and put together. It is an important programme. If the European Commission is to provide money, any member state should be able to take advantage of the funding made available.

I am sure that all hon. Members who have an interest in the subject will look closely at the result and will seek to push the interests of their constituencies, if they think that they could benefit from the programme. If there are to be European initiatives, it would be foolish of us not to take

It is crucial that the companies should be competitive and should diversify of their own free will with flair and initiative so as to be able to meet the challenges of the 1990s in a world where there will be fewer defence orders and compete successfully for both defence and non-military orders, thus ensuring that people can get back into work and use their skills. Too many highly skilled people are out of work. They must be given every help to re-skill so that they can get back to work and once again be productive and generate orders and products for this country.

I am extremely grateful for this opportunity to debate a subject that is important to many of my constituents who have been going through a very tough time. It is important for them to know that they are not forgotten and that action is being taken at Government and company level to solve their problems and to give the individuals and companies involved the opportunity to flourish and get back to work as quickly as humanly possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, may I point out that many hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye and it would be appreciated if those who are called to speak would keep their contributions as brief as possible.

8.40 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am sure that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is worried about his constituents, but his message is a little confused and contradictory. He began by saying how concerned he was about how many people in the defence industry were out of work, but concluded by saying that everything appeared to be going well. The two comments cannot be squared. He also appeared to denounce any new Government help but then welcomed a number of existing Government initiatives.

We must recognise the reality of the situation, a point mentioned by many hon. Members. We all make party political points about who will cut defence spending most —that is easy—but we must accept the facts. In 1984-85, spending on defence amounted to £26·3 billion; education spending was £24·9 billion, health spending £25·3 billion and social security spending £60·6 billion. In the last complete year, defence spending was down to £22·8

billion, education spending was up to £31 billion, spending on health amounted to £33·2 billion and spending on social security £75·9 billion. That is the reality of the cuts that have been imposed. Most people working in the defence industry are more interested in the current climate than in the threats of the Opposition, who, after all, did not win the election. The consequences of the cuts are that there has been real pain.

I always enjoy the speeches of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. He said that he was surprised at his promotion, but I was not. We have debated a number of issues, and I believe that his promotion was well deserved, although he may be rather surprised at where he has ended up. He dealt constructively with a number of the issues that have been raised, but he must recognise that the cuts mean that orders are not reduced, which has repercussions for an important sector of our manufacturing industry and for the highly skilled people who work in it.

The trigger for this debate has been the crisis at Swan Hunter as a result of the placing of a recent order. I shall deal briefly with that issue and then make some more general comments.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No, I shall respond to the constraints of the Chair. I know that there is not a 10-minute limit, but I must press on.

The Minister and the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) have made it quite clear that when there is a discrepancy of £70 million in a bid there is no question of choice. As someone who stood a little apart, I wondered why, given the scale of Swan Hunter's failure to make a competitive bid, expectations had run so high. What made Swan Hunter believe that it was close to winning the order? Was it a mistake on its part in wholly misreading the runes or misunderstanding the signals, or were there factors at play which it did not appreciate or of which it was not aware?

I welcome the fact that the National Audit Office has said that it will investigate. It will be no consolation after the event, but the investigation might come up with an answer. The Minister said that the Government would make the relevant information available, which is constructive.

Several questions arise from the placing of the order. The Minister said that the Government were not surprised by VSEL's bid but that they were surprised by the size of Swan Hunter's bid. That at least moves on the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked in the House the other day. He wondered whether there was any sign that Swan Hunter had been encouraged or advised to include a wider spread of overheads and costs in its bid whereas VSEL was able to offset some of those costs because it had the benefit of previous contracts. I know that the Minister cannot answer that question directly, although he seemed to imply that that was not his understanding of the case.

We are given to understand that, although the two designs were similar, given the difference in price the guts must have been different, whatever they looked like. Alternatively, one must conclude that Swan Hunter was shooting in the dark at what it thought were the Ministry's expectations. Such questions need to be asked, and we shall no doubt hear more about them in due course.

Another issue that arises, not only in relation to Swan Hunter, is the Ministry of Defence's apparent slowness to pay. Apparently, £20 million is due to Swan Hunter. That may not have forced it into receivership—losing the contract was perhaps the final straw—but £20 million is a considerable sum for a company to be owed by the Government. It has often been said in the House that, of all organisations within our economy, the Government should set an example of prompt payment. It does not help British industry to know that they are setting a bad example.

If we are to run down our defence manufacturing base, will we have a strategic overview at the Ministry of Defence or the Department of Trade and Industry—or preferably the two together—as to what that base should be? That point is mentioned in the amendment that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have tabled to the motion. We believe that the Government should accept that, although we cannot retain our capacity at the previous level if the requirements are not the same, we cannot allow the vagaries of the outcome of a bid at a particular time to determine what our future capacity is likely to be.

Do we, in the national interest, need the capability that exists at Swan Hunter? Does it matter, not to the people of the north-east to whom it clearly matters a great deal, but to the nation as a whole if we lose Swan Hunter? The Government do not appear to have considered that aspect. Some of us would have a little more confidence in the forward thinking of the Government's management of the defence base if there were evidence that it was being considered.

If it was concluded that a certain capacity was required, we should have more confidence if a strategy were then determined to ensure that that capacity was maintained. That is why we have suggested a 10-year review of procurement contracts. I accept that that may be regarded as a long-term view, but it would be proof that the Government were considering not only the Ministry of Defence's requirements but the industrial base to supply them over a reasonable time. I hope that Ministers will be able to tell us whether that is being considered.

The motion mentions diversification, to which the hon. Member for Chelmsford also referred. Point scoring apart, there is general agreement that our defence base has contracted and that further contraction is likely. On the positive side, we must accept that within our defence capability there is a great deal of skill and technology and a resource that should not readily be dispersed. It is said that 45 per cent. of all Britain's research and development expenditure goes on defence.

If we remove that from the economy and do not seek ways of replacing it, our research and development base will fall alarmingly in comparison to that of our major competitors, and our ability to maintain—or even achieve—a competitive edge will be seriously undermined. I accept that the Ministry of Defence may say that that is not its responsibility, but it certainly is the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry to calculate the consequences of the rundown in research and development.

It is fine to do as the Minister and other hon. Members did and cite examples of the successes of companies that have managed to diversify or to redeploy, but those are often large companies that have been able to take time to readjust. Other companies do not have the ability to respond as quickly, and for every success story there are

[Mr. Bruce]

stories of other companies that have not been able to move far enough or fast enough, either to stay in business at all, or to maintain anything like the size of their previous operations. For many companies it is wholly unrealistic to say that they should expand their research and development activities so as to move into new areas at a time when their market is contracting dramatically.

Private and City investors are likely to be a little sceptical about such a sudden switch, and about companies' ability to respond. Of course, some companies will be able to cope, but it is cavalier of the Government to dismiss out of hand the idea of agencies to assist companies that cannot adjust, or that require a little time. Yet it was the Minister who accused the Opposition of taking a cavalier attitude.

It is also important to realise that, however concerned we are to focus on the impact on the people of Tyneside of a disaster such as the Swan Hunter closure—there has been a catalogue of such events, and people understand what effect taking a major, long-established employer out of the heart of a community has on morale—the fact remains that the cut in defence expenditure affects almost every part of the United Kingdom economy.

The Minister said that more than 400 companies were regarded as major defence contractors, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has given me a letter that takes the argument one stage further. A company in his constituency, Horstman Defence Systems Ltd., had a £300,000 order with Swan Hunter, and it looks like losing the outstanding balance of that, which amounts to £141,000. That company is probably not one of the 400-plus that the Minister identified, so we see the knock-on effect of the failure of a company such as Swan Hunter. There are signs that defence contractors in Scotland, in Wales and in the far south of England are affected, and we must recognise that many of those companies cannot respond quickly.

In my constituency we have a considerable number of high-technology companies engaged in the offshore oil and gas industry. The Department of Trade and Industry should take on board the fact that that industry is volatile; it goes up and down; confidence ebbs and flows, and activity increases and decreases. In the mid-1980s, there was a sharp downturn in North sea activity as the oil price fell. In order to protect their future and ensure that their market, was more broadly based, many of the high-technology companies diversified into—yes, defence contracting. They believed that they had developed on the civil side technology that had a military application, for which they could develop a comparable market. Just as they have managed to penetrate that market, it is undergoing a savage contraction.

The Government should consider whether there are any areas in which they could provide a legitimate stimulus, particularly for research and development and for high technology, to ensure that neither the peaceful nor the military applications of the technology are lost because of the sharp contraction in the market.

It has been pointed out to me that we probably have a smaller marine offshore research programme than do most of our major European competitors. France certainly spends a lot more money on marine and offshore research and development, and Germany probably does, too. That is a shame, in view of our status as an island nation. We ought to be leading the research and development technology for offshore activity, which, I may say, runs well with our naval expertise.

I should like the Minister to consider whether initiatives could be taken jointly by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence to ensure that the technical expertise and capacity that we have developed in our defence and other high-tech industries are not lost simply because we have had to undergo a contraction that both sides of the House accept is necessary.

I urge the Government to take that idea seriously. If they do not, we may find that, in five or 10 years' time, our already weak high-tech capacity is further weakened because a public spending decision was taken without a full assessment of the implications for our trading and industrial base. I am glad that Ministers from both the DTI and the MOD are here, because it is proper that there should be a joint approach. I urge those two Departments to get together and to give us a long-term idea of a real strategy.

8.55 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Like other hon. Members, I regret that the debate should have to take place against the sombre backdrop of the awful news about Swan Hunter. I should have much preferred a two-day defence debate to take place long since, in which our overall defence equipment and procurement strategy could have been discussed within the general context of defence policy as a whole. Nevertheless, we must accept facts as they are and make the best of them.

At the outset I must declare two interests. One is political, inasmuch as I have the privilege of being on a postgraduate parliamentary industrial fellowship with TI plc, of which Dowty, TI Aerospace, is involved in military business. Secondly, I am a parliamentary adviser to Thorn EMI, which is an important defence contractor.

We shall face a growing squeeze on defence equipment procurement. I suspect that the Ministry of Defence now has the greatest difficulty in concluding its long-term costings and I know that many important programmes are under the severest critical scrutiny. Over the past eight years, the proportion of the defence budget allocated to defence equipment procurement has declined. In 1984-85, the proportion was 45·8 per cent., whereas in 1992-93—the most recent financial year for which I have figures from the Ministry of Defence—it was down to 37·3 per cent. The biggest annual drop, of 2·2 per cent., came between 1991-92 and 1992-93.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there should have been such severe redundancies. The human suffering which has been consequential upon the rundown of our defence industries has been marked, and has been felt not just on Tyneside but right across the country. It has been extremely severe in the south-east, with Rolls-Royce shedding workers at its small engine division at Leavesden, with British Aerospace losing workers from Kingston, Stevenage and Hatfield, and with job losses at Marconi and Thorn EMI. Thousands and thousands of extremely well qualified, dedicated people have lost their jobs and many communities have been hit very hard.

We must also recognise that, with our armed forces decreasing in number, it is more important than ever that we compensate for those reduced numbers by securing the

very best equipment that money can buy—within reason, of course, because a balance has to be struck between quantity and quality. If we go overboard in trying to avoid gold-plating, there will be dangers of the kind that became evident in the Falklands war. The type 21 frigates, built cheap and light, were extremely vulnerable: the aluminium decks burned and the vessels were not as effective as we had hoped. We all remember the awful scenes of HMS Ardent burning in Carlos water.

It is erroneous to suggest that one can lightly forgo naval construction standards in respect of amphibious vessels. The House will remember what happened to Atlantic Conveyor as it carried our helicopters to the scene of the action—we lost most of our Chinooks when Atlantic Conveyor went down—and what happened off Bluff Cove, when the LSL Sir Galahad was attacked. Both vessels were subject to enemy air action.

To say that we need not worry too much about the standards of construction of the LPHs because there will be destroyer screens and so on is to overlook the fact that probably the greatest threat, apart from the submarine threat, will be from enemy air attack, often with stand-off weapons delivered at very great range. I understand why the Government have pursued the path that they have and why VSEL's consortium approach with Kvaerner Govan has found favour, but we must be careful when we seek always to go for the cheapest option.

As I said, the Government face many calls upon their equipment procurement budget. In the past year and a half or so, they have to their credit announced go-aheads for the Merlin helicopter, Challenger 2 tanks, Warrior APCs, Firefly trainers and the advanced short-range air-to-air missile, ASRAAM, among other programmes but there are many pressing projects which merit a go-ahead: the new transport aircraft, either to follow on from the Hercules—the C130J—or the future large aircraft; the support helicopters that the Royal Air Force so badly needs; the attack helicopters for the Army and, I trust, the Royal Marines; multiple-launch rocket system 3 for our Army; in air-launched stand-off weaponry, the tactical air-to-surface missile and COSM, one nuclear, one conventional; a medium surface to-air missile; and long-range TRIGAT—the third-generation anti-tank guided weapons system. All those projects are bearing down upon a defence budget that is reducing constantly.

If we are to have properly equipped armed forces and defence industries that will be able to secure long-term employment for their dedicated work forces and continue to win good orders, it will be very important to modify our defence policies to make those resources available. I would advocate greater use of reserves and a steady programme of withdrawal from Germany, if and when the Russians come out of the eastern part of that country. I do not believe that we can afford from any point of view to run down our defence industries further.

I wish to refer specifically to the Navy, which I know is dear to your heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, and which is of great concern to the House. We should not forget that the Navy will have to acquire not only the new LPH but two new LPDs. Those are the sort of vessels that Swan Hunter had an almost unique capability to build. Swan's is the one yard that can build everything from CVSs—aircraft carriers—to corvettes. I know the yard well. My company had the privilege of having it briefly as a client. I know the management team, which has devoted its livelihood to achieving the management buy-out. I know the work force and the dedication and skill which it has offered to the nation.

I recognise that Swan Hunter ships are regarded as the best in the Royal Navy. No one has supported them through thick and thin, and with greater dedication, greater conviction or more impressively than my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter). In the last Navy debate, I was proud to say that I knew of no hon. Member with greater expertise of the naval construction industry than he.

I hope and trust that we will be able to rescue shipbuilding capability on the Tyne. We need it. The Horizon 2000 programme of anti-aircraft frigates must go ahead and eventually we will have to replace our existing Invincible class of aircraft carriers. We will also need more type 23s.

What lessons do I draw from this? I suggest that we need to be more open. I see no reason why we should not have open tendering, as in the United States, for major defence orders. I have said that before, I have written about it in books and I will continue to say it.

If we keep these matters under a wrap of secrecy, it does no one any good; it simply arouses suspicions. The congressional system in the United States allows the relevant committee to have an appropriations function and there is proper democratic oversight and scrutiny. I regret to say that we do not have it in this place.

At least the Americans have been able, through their congressional support, to maintain AV8A and AV8B—the Harriers I and II—in service with the United States marine corps which would not otherwise have happened. In addition, the V22 Osprey continues thanks to congressional support. We do ourselves a disservice by being as secretive as we are.

There is a disparity of £72 million. I have the actual figures and I will not embarrass my hon. Friend the Minister by repeating them. I will study the National Audit Office report with great interest as I have the real figures for VSEL and for Swan Hunter on both bids.

I suspect that the disparity arises from the huge profits that VSEL obtained from the Trident programme. The profits allowed it to pare its overheads. The factors include the differences in construction and the advice that Swan Hunter received from third parties which it hoped would be a party to the programme if the LPH went ahead on the Tyne. There are many factors and they will be revealed by the NAO.

However, in respect of the procurement business, I hope that we will learn the need for open tendering, for proper accountability to the House, for regular defence debates and for a defence procurement strategy that meets the problem of the hour, which is a declining defence budget in real terms with personnel costs that are not reducing and, ultimately, a need to develop a European dimension with the assumption by the Western European Union of the old function of the Independent European Programme Group.

I welcome this timely debate. I cannot support the defence diversification agency as I do not believe that it would do the job that the Opposition believe that it will. However, I hope and pray that my colleagues on the Government Front Bench can obtain the funds from the Treasury which our national defence needs and which our defence industry requires.

9.7 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I am pleased to catch your eye tonight, Madam Deputy Speaker, because this subject is a matter of mutual interest to you and me as Plymouth representatives. I would like to move the debate a little further south and perhaps a little towards the west. Other than from my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), we have heard nothing tonight about Plymouth and the south-west of England.

The south-west of England is the most defence-dependent area of Britain. In 1991, it was estimated that there were 187,000 defence-related jobs in the south-west. That is approximately one in 10 of the total work force.

I have made the point in the House before that Devonport was created for the needs of the Navy. The people came after the Navy. Since King William established the dockyard in 1691, it has had 302 years of service. In addition to defence-related jobs, Plymouth has a large number of service personnel.

It is worth stating in this debate that many people in Plymouth and the south-west have given their lives in conflicts during this century and in the years before it. I am bound to say that many civilians, too, who have worked in defence-related industries have given their lives. I draw testimony from the many widows whose husbands died from working with asbestos in the royal dockyards years ago.

We have lost thousands of jobs in the Devonport dockyard. Many thousands of jobs have been lost in other industries as well. Now we are seeing service personnel in our area lose their jobs. Our motion calls for action to save people who have served their country in one capacity or another from the humiliation of unemployment and the economic scrap heap. Many people who previously worked or currently work in the Devonport dockyard will be saying that Britain must now come to the aid of those who have come to the aid of Britain.

As has been said, Opposition Members accept the need for change. The defence industry, like other industries, must move with the times. Indeed, Devonport dockyard has distinguished itself in recent years by its ability to change, to adapt, to modernise and to diversify into other sectors in which it hitherto did not operate. Unlike the Government, we do not accept that the change in defence needs should automatically mean mass unemployment, skills lost to the economy, and the economic devastation of whole areas to Britain.

I recall the Conservative election promise before the election, which is now looking extremely hollow. I remember that the Conservative party said at the time that Labour's policies would lead to huge job losses in the defence industry. Conservative Members said that defence jobs were safe in their hands. The 8,000 people who have lost their jobs in the Devonport dockyard in the past five years will be asking whose fault it was that they lost their jobs. At the time they had a Tory city council, Tory Devon county council and a Tory Government. It was not the fault of the Labour party.

Since then, the people of Plymouth have had the good sense to realise that they have been betrayed by the Government and now they have a Labour city council. There are more Labour Members on Devonport county council than Conservatives. Given the chance at the next general election, the south-west will make sure that it has more than one Labour representative.

We have heard some of the reasons why diversification must take place. I would like to consider a range of Ministry of Defence activities in which diversification is needed, not just within the direct defence industries. It is not just a matter of the dockyard. In the 12 months since the election—since we were told that defence jobs would be safe in the hands of the Conservatives—we have had a drip-feed of disaster in Plymouth. The Royal Naval armaments depot in Ernesettle in my constituency is absolutely vital to the back-up work of servicing weapons. We are told now that there is a projected loss of 400 jobs in that establishment.

The Royal Naval engineering college, in which you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have taken great personal interest, and which is in Manadon in my constituency, is the Navy's only university. For more than 50 years it has had a distinguished record of producing engineering graduates of the very highest quality for the Navy. It undertakes postgraduate work that is unavailable elsewhere, serving navies throughout the world, yet we hear that a decision will be made shortly to close the Royal Naval engineering colleges, with a loss of about 300 local jobs. There has been no consultation and no thought of how those jobs might be used in the future.

We have in my constituency the Goshen Yard training school which at one time trained up to 700 engineering apprentices for the dockyard. It is currently run by a company owned by the college of further education in Devonport called Devonport Training for Quality. Now there are just a handful of students in that building. It is unique in the south-west and it contains facilities of huge potential value to other businesses and industry in the region.

Recently, British Rail and South West Water, among other large concerns in the region, have been showing great interest in the training available at the Goschen Yard school. How has the Ministry of Defence reacted to that? Negotiations between Devonport Training for Quality and the Ministry of Defence have been drifting for months. Through sheer frustration, the company has had to impose a deadline of the end of June for the achievement of a long-term lease of the premises.

If negotiations fail, the company will move to other, less suitable premises and the school—with its unique facilities—will be lost to the economy of Plymouth. I ask the Minister to act to ensure that Devonport Training for Quality has a long lease on the premises, to enable vital training work to continue.

Our dockyard in Devonport employs just over 5,000 people; five years ago, it employed 13,500. Its future now hangs on the decision on the Trident nuclear refit contract. The Minister may recall the Secretary of State for Defence saying, in a BBC television programme on 19 August last year:

"the decision will be made before Christmas."

Perhaps he can enlighten the House about which Christmas he had in mind.

So concerned were Ministers to secure a decision, as a matter of urgency, that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—who was present earlier—said on 12 January that he hoped to "make an announcement shortly". That urgency was reflected in last night's Adjournment debate,

when the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was so gripped by anxiety for a swift decision that he regretted that the process had taken

"longer than I had hoped."—[*Official Report*, 18 May 1993; Vol. 225, c. 222.]

This important decision—important, that is, to Plymouth and the south-west and to Scotland—has been subjected to procrastination, fumbling and delay by a Government who have nothing as urgent as "manana" in their lexicon. People in the south-west are asking, "Where is the planning? Where is the strategy? Who is driving the defence changes—the Ministry of Defence or the Treasury?" The thousands who have lost their jobs and the many thousands of loyal workers whose jobs are threatened have the right to an answer.

The Government's defence policy in regard to jobs is in tatters. Even on such important matters as surplus MOD housing, the Government dither while houses are vandalised. Around the country, the Ministry now has 9,291 empty properties, 527 of them in Plymouth—21 per cent. of the total. What has been Ministers' response over the past five years?

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have asked questions. On 24 October 1988, we were told:

"Over the next 12 months it is expected that 164 will be offered for sale . . . sold on the open market."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1988; Vol. 139, c. 62.]

On 11 May, we were told:

"Many of the vacant properties are undergoing modernisation . . . others are being prepared for disposal."—[*Official Report*, 11 May 1989; Vol. 152, c. *522*.]

The latest answer in this catalogue is the one that I received on 4 May:

"to ensure the early reuse of the dwellings arrangements are now in hand to sell the estate on the open market."—[*Official Report*, 4 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. *20*.]

The Government have certainly proved that procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday.

Earlier this evening, the Minister quoted Aneurin Bevan; I hope that he will forgive me if I quote Winston Churchill—not the rather troublesome Winston Churchill who often sits across from me in the Chamber, but one from an earlier era. He said:

"They are decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, all-powerful for impotence."

Plymouth and the south-west have great potential. The people have many skills; the city council is helping to provide an environment in which new enterprise can flourish and new ideas can develop. However, we desperately need the planning and co-ordination that a diversification agency could bring. At present, the south-west is like a sinking ship with Ministers throwing men overboard without supplying lifeboats. That is why I urge hon. Members to vote for our motion.

9.19 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): The House will not be surprised to hear that I intend to concentrate on the disastrous consequences that have flowed from Swan Hunter not winning the order for the landing platform helicopter carrier, followed by the immediate collapse of that esteemed and proud company. All hon. Members can understand the effect of that awful news on Tyneside.

Swan Hunter had already slimmed to a shadow of its former self but was still a major employer and a proud part of our traditional industrial scene. It is a company of which all on Tyneside have been justly proud for many years. It has a record that is second to none in its performance in turning out magnificent ships for the Royal Navy, including ships with no defects whatever—senior admirals have told me that that is almost impossible to achieve.

We meet for this debate tonight under a great cloud of sadness at the news that Swan Hunter lost the order. It has closed its doors under its present ownership and a receiver has been appointed. The House will appreciate how our local community has been hit hard in its mind, its soul and its prospects by this tragic news.

Every effort must be made to create alternative economic activity in Wallsend and on Tyneside. We have reason to be hopeful because we have a good record in the north-east of inward investment from abroad. We have experienced regional agencies—there are none better in the United Kingdom—for attracting and using to the utmost the tools that are available for the creation of new employment and new industry. I welcome the new enterprise zone. Such zones have proved successful in other parts of the country and we are determined that the enterprise zone will prove successful for the people of Tyneside, too. We have the assurance of continued regional assistance status which will be helpful to the whole area. Of course, our principal asset is our excellent local labour force.

My main aim tonight is to concentrate on the future of Swan Hunter. In the light of some of the comments made earlier, I shall refer to its recent history for a moment. First, I pay tribute to the yard's great achievements. It has built ships of the highest quality and concentrated recently on warships. The yard tried ceaselessly to obtain export orders—an enormous amount of effort has gone in that direction. Sadly, there was no prospect of success until recently, although ironically at the last minute there was hope of obtaining an order for two ships for Oman. Even in the present circumstances, I hope that it will be possible for Swan Hunter to build those two Omani ships.

I must remind the House that Swan Hunter is still continuing to operate at present, and it would be very good news if it could build those two ships. We are talking about a yard with the highest standard of technology and a first-class design facility which is not bettered anywhere in the country or—I would like to think—in the shipbuilding world.

Recently there has been a steady slimming of the Swan Hunter labour force. I found it interesting to be reminded of these figures. In 1981, there were well over 9,000 people working at Swan Hunter. The number fell steadily over the years to 7,000 in 1984, 4,000 in 1985, then 3,000 and now 2,200 today. Recently, there have been a number of sad blows. We lost the last frigate order. Sadly, we were not second in the competition—we were third. That shows the tremendous competitive pressures in the warship building industry. It is perfectly legitimate for the House to consider whether the possible end of warship building at Swan Hunter unfortunately limits the competition for the future. That negative effect should be borne in mind when we contemplate the ultimate future of Swan Hunter as a warship building unit.

Swan Hunter diversified into building the Antarctic survey vessel. I understand that a large loss was made on building this superb ship, but I do not know the reason for that. Latterly, the yard ran into severe financial difficulties—that had been the case for some months. At

[Mr. Neville Trotter]

the end, it was hanging on by its financial fingernails from day to day. It was entirely dependent on that one order, which we all hoped that Swan Hunter would win.

I do not know what the Vickers figures were, but I have been told the Swan Hunter figures. The initial bid was £174 million. I trust that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) can confirm that figure. The £174 million rose to £210 million. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees with my figures. I was alarmed when the final bid was increased by £36 million. A question was asked earlier about when the final bid went in. I believe that it happened on 22 April.

It is unfortunate in any bidding process to add a figure of that size to one's bid at the final stage. When the National Audit Office report comes out I shall read with interest the circumstances which required that huge increase in the bid. I fear that it may well have been the final straw.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend is enlightening the House on important matters. He is right that the first bid was £174 million. The final bid from Swan Hunter was £210 million, but it was revised upwards to £230 million. There is a suggestion—it may be contradicted—that Ministry of Defence officials were not averse to that upward adjustment. I do not know whether that is true. My hon. Friend may be able to elucidate. However, it was instructive and interesting that from the first to the second bid the VSEL-Kvaerner bid went down, not up.

Mr. Trotter: It is a feature of commercial haggling that one tends to bring one's price down at the final stage to secure the contract. That is why I have in my mind the question about how Swan Hunter was ill advised, required or forced, perhaps by financial pressures—we shall know in due course when the auditor reports—to make an enormous increase of 30 or 40 per cent. in its original bid. I have been given the figure of £210 million as the final bid that was entered.

I was amazed when I heard about the incredibly large difference. Of course there is always a loser and a winner. There is always a difference. But a difference on this scale seemed beyond normal experience. I asked my right hon. Friend the Minister whether I could talk to the Controller of the Navy and he was good enough to agree to that. I received assurances, one of which I relayed to the House this evening, from the controller. His basic assurances were that both yards had been asked to design for the same requirements, and that the Navy was perfectly satisfied with the ship that it was getting. When I asked him about the price, he said that it was in line with the original estimate of the cost to the Navy.

It was not sufficient on an issue of this enormous significance and effect on Tyneside that an individual Member of Parliament should have simply an assurance from the Controller. The Controller is a most honourable man whom I have known and respected for many years. He gave me answers to my questions. It seemed to me that the issue was so great that a formal independent inquiry was required. That is what the directors of Swan Hunter requested.

Therefore, I contacted my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee. He accepted that an emergency meeting should be held. At that meeting, the members of the Committee, including myself, agreed that an inquiry should be undertaken. We were prepared to undertake the inquiry ourselves if the NAO did not accept our invitation.

It is in everyone's interest that the NAO has accepted the invitation. It is the best qualified body to undertake the inquiry. It has the power to send for all information and all persons. It has expert staff to carry out the inquiry. I know that the whole House and certainly the whole of Tyneside will await its ultimate conclusions with the greatest of interest.

In the light of some of the comments made earlier tonight, it is fitting to say that I am convinced that the ship would never have been built if we had had a Labour Government. There is no doubt in my mind about that. Only a few months ago, the Labour party voted overwhelmingly for a cut of £6 billion or £7 billion a year in defence spending. That is equivalent to the whole cost of the Royal Navy, and about four times what we spend each year on the purchase of ships for the Navy.

The most important matter that I wish to draw to the attention of the House is the immediate and critical decision that the three frigates being built on the Tyne should be completed there. That is essential to the ongoing future of the great skill centre at Swan Hunter. If there is to be any future for that firm, it is essential that those frigates be built there. Yesterday afternoon, I saw my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in connection with this matter, and I noted his words:

> "I share the concern of you and everyone on Tyneside that Swan Hunter should be able to complete the type 23 frigates if at all possible. We have that aim very much in mind in our current discussions with the receiver."

I hope that those discussions will be speedy. I understand the complexity of what is involved in renegotiating from the start, but it is essential that the uncertainty on Tyneside be brought to an end as soon as possible. I believe that we can finish those ships to our normal high standards and specifications, and at a better cost than could be achieved by their removal to any other place. I need hardly stress the significance to Tyneside of this decision. The future of Swan Hunter and of its new owners depends entirely on it.

There has been some reference to a takeover of Swan Hunter. It was quite clear that the company could not have continued independently, even if it had obtained the LPH order. Heads of agreement between Swan Hunter and GEC had been signed. If the order had gone to Swan Hunter, GEC would immediately have taken the company over and would presumably have put in the cash that was needed to keep it going. I hope that, even in the present circumstances, we shall still see such a move. GEC is one of our great companies. It has intimate knowledge of the background of the technology and of every other feature of Swan Hunter. It has been through all aspects of the business.

I am told by the receiver that there has been an encouraging number of inquiries about the future of the yard. He can be assured that all hon. Members will give him every possible assistance as he seeks to provide further activity to ensure a future for Swan Hunter. This is a matter of the greatest concern to the people of Tyneside.

9.32 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Wallsend): In the very brief time available to me I do not want to dwell on the events of last week, but I have to say that the concern that people on Tyneside feel about the way in which the LPH contract was awarded has not been lessened by today's admission of Kvaerner Govan's commercial director, David Smith, that his company tendered for a commercial ship, not a naval vessel. The fact that an LPH carrying Royal Marines into trouble spots will have been built to the same specifications as a passenger ferry must cause great concern among many hon. Members.

Mr. Davidson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Byers: As I have only two minutes, I cannot give way.

The sequence of events last week has galvanised the community on Tyneside around a very simple campaign, which has a number of clear and precise objectives. Paramount is the fact that we wish to retain a shipyard and a shipbuilding capacity on the Tyne. If we are to be successful in that regard, it is imperative that we retain the design team. We must retain the technical expertise at Swan Hunter. There must be no steps to declare any of those people redundant until all the options and all the potential buyers have been investigated.

Secondly, the order for the three type 23 frigates, on which work is continuing as normal, must be guaranteed by the Ministry of Defence. Assurances from Ministers —even from the Prime Minister—that the Government will use their best endeavours are not enough; the work must be guaranteed within the next few days.

Thirdly, we know that there are other Ministry of Defence orders in the programme. These should be brought forward as a matter of urgency. Those orders include refits on three landing ships, an AOR3 and a batch of new type 23 frigates. There must be access to intervention funding so that there can be diversification in future into the merchant sector. Help must be given with export orders. A tender went in last Friday for a contract in Oman. I hope that the Government will give all possible assistance to efforts to secure that tender.

Mr. Aitken: We are in touch with the Omani authorities and have been trying to be as helpful as possible to Swan Hunter in receivership.

Mr. Byers: I am grateful for those comments.

Tyneside is not using special pleading, but asking for fair play. Shipbuilding is vital to the manufacturing and industrial base of Tyneside. If the Government thought that the people of Tyneside would sit back and let shipbuilding die, they made a grave error. The survival of shipbuilding is vital to provide jobs for the present and a future for our children. With political will, our objectives can be achieved. The country will be waiting to see what action the Government will take to retain shipbuilding on Tyneside.

9.36 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Naturally, much of tonight's debate has centred on the problems facing Swan Hunter and what a number of my hon. Friends have described as the human and commercial tragedy in Tyneside. The sad fact is that, while Swan Hunter makes an immediate focus for tonight's debate, over the past two or three years there has been a catalogue of defence companies in all regions that have faced exactly the same problems as Swan Hunter.

The list of companies is not a catalogue of doom and gloom, but is crucial in relation to the argument. It contains Swan Hunter, Cammell Laird, VSEL at Barrow —which has lost substantial numbers of jobs even though it won the recent contract—British Aerospace at Kingston upon Thames, British Aerospace in Lancashire, British Aerospace dynamics division in Bristol, Rolls Royce military engines division in Bristol, British Aerospace in Stevenage, GEC Avionics in Kent, the royal ordnance factories in Nottingham and Vickers in Leeds. All those companies have experienced substantial job losses.

Mr. Richards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fatchett: No, because we are short of time and we have already heard an intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

The crucial point about each of those companies is that the change in job structure and employment opportunities has not occurred as a result of technological changes as the Minister argued, but as a result of changes in the market place.

The Minister claimed that the Labour party—it could also be said of the Liberals—was trying to advance the argument that the defence industry was "tottering towards the grave". Nothing could be further from the truth. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) recognised the success, importance, achievements, technology and skills of many of those companies. The Opposition do not want to run down the industries, but advance an argument to show the problems that those companies face in the marketplace.

The list of companies is strategically important to the British industrial base for a variety of reasons, including the fact that a major skills base exists in our defence-related industries, which contain many of our best trained employees. The same is true of shipbuilding and aerospace. I saw a comment last week—I think made by the Minister with responsibility for industry—that some of the arguments in relation to Swan Hunter sounded like those of the 1970s. The Minister is out of touch with the substantial technological changes that have taken place in shipbuilding and does not understand the high level of technology and skills involved in that industry.

When British Aerospace announced 2,000 redundancies at its Kingston plant, according to a survey by the local training and enterprise council 45 per cent. of the laid-off workers were professional and technical staff and another 20 per cent. were skilled craft workers—all of them crucial to the country. Such workers are leaving manufacturing industry because they feel that their skills have been undervalued and their jobs made insecure. I fear that many of them are going into the service industries. So we are losing skills into which a great deal of investment has gone for a number of years. We need those skills for our future industrial performance.

The research and development base is crucial not just to the defence industries but to the spin-offs in the civilian sector. These companies make large investments, often with Government money and often in Government-sponsored research or collaboration projects. If we take

[Mr. Fatchett]

away this base the country will be left lagging behind in R and D and falling even further behind in its ability to compete with Europe.

According to a recent European Commission report, Britain has the second most defence-dependent economy in the EC after France. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) and the hon. Members for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) all arrived at the same conclusion: defence companies must now operate in a changed framework. The collapse of the Soviet Union was an important part of that change. Recalling the defence debates of a few years ago, we may note that the whole object of Conservative defence expenditure was directed at the Soviet Union. I had hoped that the Conservative Members who used that argument would plan for the future. It seems that they now recognise that the Soviet Union has collapsed and that the framework has changed.

Putting aside all petty party political points, the Minister told us—he does not appear to have got the point across to his own Back Benchers—that the Government plan to cut defence expenditure by 9 per cent. in the next three years. Speakers from all parties have agreed on that changed framework.

What do the Government believe they should do in these circumstances? We all recognise the importance of the defence companies, skills and R and D. The crisis encompasses not only our defence capacity but our whole industrial base. The Government's answer is, "Don't bother us; don't ring us; leave it all to the marketplace." We know what happens in the marketplace. The market has been deliberately shrunk by Government action. Our Government and other Governments have reduced their defence budgets.

If we leave the defence industries to the marketplace, it will be a case of Swan Hunter today, other companies tomorrow. The list will continue to grow. The Government are washing their hands of their responsibility. Typically, Conservative Members blame the Government, but will do nothing about the problem.

Defence-related companies have not in any case operated in a free market. They have depended on Government action in all sorts of ways. They have depended on the Government for domestic defence procurement. They have enjoyed what one might term an agreed market, owing to Government action. They have had significant Government funding for research and development and significant Government help with exports. The Government have clearly been involved in the overseas orders won by Britain's defence companies.

The market is not free, because there is direct Government intervention. The Government propose to wash their hands of companies whose success and viability depended on Government intervention, and they are doing that just when those companies need their help.

Some hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Chelmsford were absolutely right when they said that we should take a strategic view. But we all know that markets cannot take a strategic view: they cannot plan ahead. The Government are abdicating their responsibilities and again looking for an opt-out clause. One day it is Maastricht and the social chapter, the next day they opt out of their responsibility for our industrial base.

Other Governments and countries recognise the problems. In opening the debate for the Opposition, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) spoke about the French, the Germans and the Americans. Those Governments are taking action and recognising the problem. Ours is the only Government who feel that they can abdicate all their responsibilities for those matters.

We are not debating just defence expenditure but the need to protect Britain's industrial base. That is why Labour has demanded intervention and is arguing for a defence diversification agency. The Government must play a role in partnership with companies and employees so that Britain's industrial base can be rebuilt and maintained. No other country would abdicate its responsibility for companies of such importance.

When asked to choose between action to protect our industrial base or inaction, on every occasion the Government and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement choose inaction. That is why I ask my hon. Friends to vote for our motion, because only the Labour party has a strategy for the future and is concerned about our defence industry and our industrial strategy.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): I welcome this debate, and also welcome the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) back to it. I am sorry that he missed so many of the contributions.

The debate has brought out some of the positive aspects of changes in the defence market, as well as some of the inevitable disadvantages. Not for the first time, the incoherence of Labour policy on defence has been revealed.

We all know that the end of the cold war means that the United Kingdom's defence spending can decline by about 3 per cent. a year for the next three or four years. The effect of that on companies in the defence industry and on the areas in which they are located will vary. On the positive side, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said, competitive procurement has helped our defence industrial base to become one of the most efficient and successful in the world. It would be nice to have that recognised more fully by the Opposition.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is my right hon. Friend rather surprised that throughout the debate, the thrust of which has been about policy to help Tyneside, no one has mentioned the fact that the defence diversification agency, which was suggested by the Opposition, was rejected by the Select Committee on Employment which looked at that issue? The three measures that the Government have announced were those that the Select Committee report advocated in the context of the Government and enterprise agencies.

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend makes an effective point; I shall speak later about the concept of a defence conversion agency.

Our defence industrial base is, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement said, proving its competitiveness in the international markets. The success of our exports, which have increased two and a half times since the mid-1980s, is evidence of that, as is the fact that we are now the second-largest exporter, having overtaken France in the past few years. Defence is a net contributor to the balance of payments and sustains about

120,000 jobs through exports. Last year, the total value of export contracts signed was about £5 billion, a record level for our defence industry.

During the debate, a number of ideas have been put forward and a number of schemes have been mentioned, and I want to say something about some of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) drew attention to a scheme called KONVER, which is the latest in a series of Community structural fund initiatives, prepared by the EC Commission with the intention of addressing the problems of a specific industry.

The Government object strongly to such schemes in general, since they take such a partial approach to industrial adjustment. We object to KONVER in particular because of the mismatch between the areas where there are or may be job losses in the defence industry and the objective 2 and 5b areas which may be the only areas eligible for support.

Another serious deficiency in the scheme is the level of our allocation. It fails to reflect the importance of our defence manufacturing. We are making a forceful representation to the Commission about the way in which the funds are apparently being allocated. However, I agree with my hon. Friend that, if there is to be a scheme, it would be foolish not to take advantage of it. I hope that member states' KONVER programmes will be approved by September and we shall obviouly proceed if we get that approval.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Sainsbury: No, there is no time to give way.

I come now to the important matter of Swan Hunter. The past achievements and the present plight of Swan Hunter were described most eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter). I shall say something first about claims which it has been suggested are a problem. It has been said that the Ministry of Defence owes Swan Hunter money. The Ministry of Defence has been scrupulous in making timely payments to the company, both on the AOR and on the type 23 frigate contracts, in full accordance with the terms of those contracts. The Ministry of Defence does not accept that it owes the company money.

Swan Hunter has made a claim for losses that it says it incurred on the replenishment vessel AOR2. That is a complex matter which the Ministry of Defence has been assessing as quickly as possible. It has been unable to accept some of the claim, but has made interim payments totalling no less than £8 million. I remind the House that the Ministry of Defence has obligations under the Insolvency Act 1986 and it could not responsibly have paid any more at this time. I confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth that the best and final offer date was, as he said, 22 April 1993.

Let me say something briefly in the time available about our response to what we are well aware to be serious consequences for Tyneside of the receivership of Swan Hunter. We recognise that this is a blow to those employed in the yard, their families, the local suppliers and the whole community, particularly in view of the yard's long and distinguished history as a warship builder.

My Department is keeping in close touch with the receiver to see that prospects for maintaining some engineering or shipbuilding-related activities are fully explored. We shall also be doing all we can to see that new jobs are brought to the area. I announced last week a package of additional measures to help attract new investment and new jobs. In the time available, I shall not rehearse them this evening, but attracting new inward investment will be important. It is lucky that the region has a good record on that. Some good inward investment projects are in prospect, and my Department and the Northern Development Company are pursuing them energetically for the north-east.

Opposition Members were dismissive of a package of measures such as that which I describe. Enterprise zones and other special regional initiatives have been most successful in helping to attract new investment in the wake of closures—[HON. MEMBERS: "In Sunderland?"] I will come to Sunderland in a moment, if members of the Opposition Front Bench will refrain from sedentary interventions.

Corby is an excellent example. There, 3,500 steel jobs were lost, but since then 13,000 jobs have been created. The Gateshead zone attracted substantial private sector investment and 2·75 million sq ft of new space—mainly industrial—has been produced. At Consett, 3,500 jobs were lost, but 4,000 replacement jobs were created.

As to Sunderland, the Government's special package of measures announced in 1988 resulted in the creation of 3,750 jobs. It can be done—and, I am happy to say, all concerned will be pulling together to see that it is done. Local partnerships are vital. There is an excellent record of co-operation in the north-east on which to build.

We heard a lot about defence conversion. We should talk not about conversion but about diversification, because that is a more realistic and useful objective. We are talking about firms building on their enormous technological skills and know-how, to increase their penetration of civilian markets. Related diversification has succeeded in reducing many firms' dependency on defence, from something like 100 per cent. to nearer 70 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford gave examples of achievements by Marconi—an important company in his constituency.

I remind the House of the measures that we take to help companies. We encourage innovation. We have the enterprise initiative and training and enterprise councils are giving particularly useful help to firms with counselling, information and advice, training and business skills. More specifically, my Department supports company efforts to diversify through the series of "Changing Tack" regional seminars held over the past year to highlight diversification possibilities.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement asked pertinent questions about the Opposition's proposal for a defence conversion agency. What would it do? What is it meant to do? How would it undertake its task? If subsidies were to be involved, how compatible would they be with the level playing field that the Opposition always seek? From where would the money come? I share the scepticism expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Norwood (Mr. Wilkinson).

At the end of this debate, we are no wiser as to what that agency would do. I am reminded of King Lear's words:

> "I will do such things—
> What they are yet, I know not."

We are in the same position in respect of the defence conversion agency.

[Mr. Sainsbury]

The debate exposed the absurdity of Labour's proposal for such an agency—son of the National Enterprise Board, if ever there was one. It reveals once again the depth of Labour's lack of understanding of how to help British industry become more competitive and better able to create sustained employment. It has exposed something more—the hypocrisy of a party that consistently voted for massive reductions in defence spending, but then cynically complains about potential job losses in the very defence industries that Labour's policies would decimate.

That is a typical example of political expediency from a party that does not have the courage to face the facts and tell its supporters the truth. The motion was put before the House tonight for one purpose only—to get the Labour party off the hook.

Nor do we need reminders about the shamefaced shambles that characterises Liberal Democrat policy. Or should I say policies, because that party has as many policies as it has members—and a different lot for tomorrow. It puts me in mind of Kipling's couplet:

"There are nine and sixty ways
Of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right."

The trouble with Liberal policies is that most of them are left and all of them are wrong.

I commend the amendment to the motion to the House. The Labour party has had 14 years of irresponsibility over defence policy. It has not learnt. It still sees phantom orders for phantom ships pursuing phantom enemies.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 304.

Division No. 276] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*

Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John D. Taylor and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville

Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

'That this House recognises with gratitude the efforts and skills over the years of all workers in the defence industries who have ensured that the United Kingdom's security has been maintained with the best of equipment and weapons; notes that the policy of competition for defence orders adopted by Her Majesty's Government has resulted in an efficient United Kingdom defence industry with world-class export performance; condemns the 25 per cent. defence cuts demanded by the Labour Party Conference which would cripple Britain's armed forces and her defence industry; rejects the idea of a Defence Diversification Agency to second-guess business decisions that should more properly be taken by companies; but welcomes the assistance provided by Her Majesty's Government to help regions to adjust more effectively to major industrial change by creating opportunities for new industries, as exemplified by the wide-ranging package of measures announced last week for Tyneside.'.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Orders on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

INSURANCE

That the draft Insurance Companies (Cancellation) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 19th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Question agreed to.

Petrol Stations (Leakage)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the House to some of the problems relating to petrol leakage from storage tanks in garages throughout the country. I apologise to the Minister for keeping him late, but I am sure that he will find the matter of some interest.

In my constituency, there have been three serious leakages of petrol from garage storage tanks, involving many hundreds of gallons of fuel, in the past 12 months. In one case, on County road in Ormskirk, the problem, although serious, was tackled efficiently because a large company—Esso—was the owner. I am informed that, where large companies such as Esso or Shell are involved, the lines of responsibility are clear, the pollution is tackled correctly and the polluter pays. However, in the case of the other two leakages, the garages were small companies and the problems were more acute.

In one case, on the A59 in Rufford village, the petrol leaked through the drains under the trunk road and into the cellars of the Hesketh Arms on the opposite side of the road. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is not petrol that one wants to find in the cellars of a pub. The potential tragedy in such a situation is not hard to imagine. In that case, the local authorities moved rapidly to neutralise the danger.

The third incident encapsulates all the problems that I want to bring to the Government's attention. Almost 12 months ago, a severe leakage of petrol was detected from Church garage on the A570 in Scarisbrick. The pollution from that leakage covered 20,000 sq m. It contaminated 2,000 cu m of soil and 500 cu m of water. The leakage passed into and under adjacent houses and, through the drains under the trunk road, to houses opposite. The cellar of an old vicarage nearby was filled with a mixture of petrol and water, and I believe that about 150 gallons of petrol were taken from the cellar. The owners of the old vicarage, the Kennedy family, who have spent everything they have on refurbishing the building, are now devastated to find that their property is virtually worthless. The same applies to several other home owners in the vicinity.

I am indebted to David Pirret, the general manager of Shell UK retail division, who made a clear analysis of such problems in a speech on 29 April. He said:

> "The fragmentation that now exists at local and regional level; and the widely differing levels of technical understanding; make any meaningful dialogue extremely difficult."

In the Scarisbrick case, the garage owner, faced with tremendous costs, put his business into liquidation. For any business of that size, the identification of statutory nuisance and the threat of the serving of an abatement order, are almost bound to lead to liquidation. That means that there is no company on which to serve the abatement order.

We then move into the question of responsibility. That is shared between several bodies. The first is the district council—in this case, West Lancashire district council—as the environment health authority. West Lancashire has already spent about £60,000 on monitoring and testing, which is a substantial slice of its total capped budget of £9·2 million.

The county council is responsible for licensing through the petroleum officer—in this case, the fire brigade—and it is also responsible as agent for the trunk road under which the petrol leaked through the drains. The Department of Transport is ultimately responsible for the trunk road itself, and the National Rivers Authority became partly responsible, because the petrol leaked for a while into a small watercourse. In other cases, I believe that the water board and local planning authorities have also had responsibilities.

The garage's insurance policy appears to cover only unexpected immediate leakages. The Scarisbrick leak seems to have been going on for some time. Some petrol was found to be fresh, while other petrol had broken down. It may therefore prove impossible to establish insurance liability.

To dig out the affected land would cost up to £250,000, according to the district council. Clearly, the district council cannot afford that. It becomes an awkward question of judgment for the authorities which must assess the risk involved in such pollution with cost very much in mind.

Lancashire county council and West Lancashire district council assess the risk now as small. However, only three or four weeks ago, vapour levels again rose dramatically, probably due to the petrol underground rising on the surface of water. The land there lies on a clay layer, which is virtually impervious.

While both local authorities are doing their job properly, they cannot tackle the problem faced by the neighbouring householders who have seen the value of their houses reduced to nothing. Yesterday, Mrs. Kennedy informed me that her insurance company had informed her that it now refused cover for her house. I am sure that the other people who have been affected, including Mr. and Mrs. Chisnall next door but two and the Reverend Mr. Goode who inhabits the new rectory, have identical problems.

That is the immediate personal crisis for several of my constituents that I would like the Minister to consider. They are ordinary citizens who, through absolutely no fault of their own, find themselves possibly ruined. Although they are personally protected from danger by the local authorities—at least, I hope so—they are unable at the moment to seek compensation from a company which has gone into liquidation. They also face insufficient insurance cover.

In those cases, the polluter does not and cannot pay. that is just one example. A Salford university student, David Watson, recently produced a study which showed that there were more than 280 cases of leakages from storage tanks across the country, although over an unspecified period of years. Petroleum officers informed our local authorities of 216 cases in the past 12 months in just 29 local authorities, and 54 cases were assessed as fire hazards. In Warrington, there was a case in which 17,000 gallons were spilled in that manner. The worst case was in the constituency of the Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) and involved between 20,000 and 25,000 gallons.

The Minister will appreciate that the country is threaded by pipes, culverts and underground watercourses which can transport petrol or vapour in unforeseen and even undetected directions. In the Scarisbrick case, it was found that petrol had been leaking through an old culvert under a nearby church, the church of St. Mark, and close to a nearby primary school. It makes me shudder to think that only a couple of miles up the road is Martin Mere, the country's second largest wetland bird sanctuary. If petrol had got into that area, there would have been a different disaster.

David Pirret from Shell reports that between 30 and 40 per cent. of United Kingdom petrol filling stations have problems and that those problems centre on suction lines —that accounts for 90 per cent. of the total—the flexipipes on the pumps, single-skin tanks—the one at County road turned out to have quite a hole in it when it was dug out —and the absence of a proper monitoring system of tank space, overfill prevention and vapour recovery systems. He also makes a point that I wish to emphasise; the problem is more likely to arise in rural sites, which tend to be older. The Minister's constituency, which I know extremely well, contains many garages which might present a hazard at some point in future.

In the case of Shell, a renovation programme is in process—replacing single-skin with double-skin tanks, replacing metal suction lines with plastic suction lines, putting check valves on pumps and, perhaps most important, installing sensitive tank monitoring systems which he says could detect a teacup of oil disappearing. In the cases that I am talking about, several hundred, if not thousands, of gallons have disappeared undetected for a long time. The costs of all that for Shell are vast, and could be undertaken only by large companies. It is not a solution for a small company.

I hope that the problems are clear, and I shall conclude by putting the key points to the Minister. Is it possible to legislate for unambiguous insurance policies which cover the total cost of pollution from leaks? Is it possible to have tighter monitoring, more frequent monitoring and inspection? Is it possible to tighten up the licensing process?

At present, there is only annual relicensing. The local authority can require inventory checks, but it is not obliged to, and after the first installation of storage tanks, the next inspection does not have to be undertaken for 20 years. Is it possible to simplify the range of responsible authorities? How can help be given to small local authorities in particular when they face crises that they cannot fund?

Am I pessimistic in my assumption that, if proper and sufficient regulations are fully implemented, the logical conclusion will be that small garages become completely non-viable and only the big chains will have the resources to protect the environment, as Shell is trying to do? Of course, most important, how can my constituents who face appalling domestic calamity be helped out of the hole into which they have undeservedly been thrust? The Minister will appreciate that, because of the time, I have not ventured into the decommissioning of sites and the existence of abandoned storage tanks, but enough problems have been aired for one evening, and I am grateful for his attention.

10.28 pm

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have the permission of the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall)?

Mr. Pickthall: Yes.

Mr. Hall: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) for initiating this important debate. I am grateful also to the Minister for allowing me a couple of minutes of his precious time to add to some of the points that my hon. Friend has made.

My hon. Friend referred to the work of David Watson, who works for the environmental health department of Warrington borough council. I commend it to the Minister, as it encapsulates all the problems that my hon. Friend outlined. One problem is that, when petrol leaks from petrol station tanks, it spoils the environment in several ways. It gets into the soil and into the local environment; it can get into water courses and end up in sewers. The problem is that, if 1 per cent. of the natural atmosphere is affected, it is then a flammable atmosphere, while if up to 8 per cent. is affected, the atmosphere becomes explosive. The report refers to a number of such incidents; I shall refer briefly to three.

The report—a statement of qualification experience prepared for Warrington borough council—mentions, for instance, an incident in Lincolnshire in which a petrol station leak put 5,000 litres of petrol into the surrounding area. It threatened the water supply of a local hospital. In another instance, vapour levels in the basement of an adjoining cottage reached explosive levels. In Warwickshire, in the west midlands, after a long-term leak from a petrol station, a number of adjacent properties were affected. That is just a small sample.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West has mentioned two major issues involving Warrington, part of which I represent. The principal problem is the number of agencies involved in trying to clean up after the leaks. First, there is the petroleum officer, who registers petrol stations and retains responsibility while they are still operating. If a station goes out of business, the petroleum officer's role ends, as he has no off-site monitoring powers. An officer can be appointed by the fire brigade; he can also be a member of the trading standards authority. In Scotland, he may even be a member of the local authority. Three agencies are thus involved.

Secondly, the local authority—under the Environmental Protection Act 1990—has a responsibility for off-site contamination from petrol station sites. Its responsibility is first to investigate complaints put to the local authority; it must then decide whether to take action on the basis of the following test: is what is happening prejudicial to public health, or is it a nuisance? If the leakage fails to meet those criteria, the local authority is not obliged to act.

The National Rivers Authority also has some power. It is obliged to act under the Water Resources Act 1991, but only when controlled waters are affected. The Health and Safety Executive is involved in the storage of petrol at petrol stations, but has no remit when pollution extends beyond them. Then there are the water companies, which can take action if their water supply is threatened. Having acted, they then bill those who have caused the problem; but if—as in the case cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West—the petrol company has gone out of business and lost its third party liability insurance, there will be no one for the water authority to take action against.

In the majority of cases, effective action takes place. There are 20,800 petrol stations registered in the United Kingdom. When there is co-operation between the petrol companies and the authorities, there will be few problems, but when companies have gone out of business, there will be a serious problem, which my hon. Friend has highlighted.

The Warrington example has already been mentioned. As a result of a long-term leak from a petrol station, 17,000 gallons of pollution ended up in a local environment. All credit must go to Shell UK. Investigating the site, it discovered the level of pollution and brought in the local authority. It pumped off 17,000 gallons of petrol. The local authority then found petrol in the drain next to the station, and got the fire brigade to flush out the drain. That process pushed petrol into the water course. The National Rivers Authority was notified, but took no action; the local authority had to go back to its drainage section to trace the problems that had led to the original leak. The land is now being decontaminated. The whole thing worked quite well.

We see a different side of the story, however, in Braintree, in Essex. Over a long period, between 20,000 and 25,000 gallons of petrol ended up in the subsoil around a petrol station there as a result of a leak. The county and district councils were faced with the cost of clearing up, because the petrol station had gone out of business and the third party liability insurance had disappeared. Over four and a half years, the two local authorities spent a great deal of money trying to solve the problem. That is okay, but what happens when a small district authority cannot afford what could be £250,000? It is a real problem.

I shall conclude now because I have used my two examples. We want stringent guidelines for petrol station storage; we want more frequent and effective inspection and we want a unitary authority that will deal with the problem from top to bottom—it should not be left to a multi-agency. We need help for local authorities so that, when they recognise their responsibilities, they have the resources available to tackle the pollution problem.

If local authorities are given the power to inspect off-site pollution from petrol stations—the Minister may agree to this—the onus will not fall on small petrol stations and force them out of business simply to avoid their responsibilities. I commend the recommendations in the report to the Minister, which I shall certainly let him have. I thank my hon. Friend for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

10.35 pm

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) and thank him for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. It is in one way a local matter, but it also raises issues of general importance to which the House should rightly turn from tiime to tme.

The cases to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention illustrate the problems faced by local authorities and other public bodies in dealing with contamination. I am conscious of those problems and their complexity. The issues I will address include the powers and duties of public authorities to control or remedy contamination, preventive measures, methods for treating land once pollution has taken place and assessing the risks that attach to particular types of operation with polluting potential. The first point is that more than one public authority can get

involved in a case of this sort to prevent it from happening in the first place, to put the burden of remedial action where it belongs—on the polluter—or to take action when

As the hon. Members for Lancashire, West and for Warrington, South (Mr. Hall) may know, the Government have decided to review the powers and duties of public authorities which bear on contaminated land, including their powers to recover costs. That review has a considerable bearing on the issues raised tonight by the hon. Member for Lancashire, West, and I shall refer to it several times.

First, we wish to see cases of contamination such as the ones described by the hon. Gentleman tackled on a sensible basis. That is, action should be taken where the hazards to health or the environment are real and the means for tackling them are appropriate to both the problem and the continuing or intended use of the site. "Appropriate" also includes the matter of costs. We do not want to see environmental improvement or restoration carried out whatever the cost—the benefits must exceed the costs.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether small companies can survive proper regulation. That is another way of matching improvements to resources. I can assure him that we will not impose unnecessary or costly regulations on any company, large or small. He is right to draw attention to the fact that, while Shell and other large companies can take great measures to improve the potential for no leakage from their tanks—especially as they operate bigger sites—in rural areas and many smaller stations we could make the petrol tanks water tight. As the hon. Member for Warrington, South said, we could have stringent regulations to ensure that there would never be the slightest leak, but that would result in no smaller petrol stations at all—the cost would be astronomical.

Secondly, we wish to see the polluter pay. A company, large or small, should bear the cost of putting right any damage that it has done. But, in these cases, the "polluter" has gone away. Under such circumstances, there is no ready answer to the problem of who should pay. It can be unfair if the cost falls to others—notably, as the hon. Member for Lancashire, West pointed out, people like his constituents, who are on the receiving end of the damage. That is why our review includes the issue of liabilities for past pollution. I am afraid that I cannot promise that the outcome will please the hon. Gentleman, but the issue of fairness is one that we are addressing. In the meantime, his constituents have the usual rights of landowners to seek legal redress against others.

Thirdly, our review is focusing on the role of the pollution control authorities. It is intended to remove any doubts and inconsistencies in the way in which their powers operate. I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman that we will reduce the number of the appropriate players in this.

After all, the situation that has been described has many dimensions—health and safety at work, the threat to public health and homes, the threat to groundwater and threats of air pollution. The Health and Safety Executive, the National Rivers Authority and the local authority all have legitimate roles at present.

I should be worried about trying to create the all-singing all-dancing agency that the hon. Gentleman suggested, because it might not have the appropriate expertise to deal with all aspects. What we must do is ensure that, where two, three or four agencies are involved, they clearly understand their responsibilities and there are no gaps or unnecessary bureaucratic overlaps between them. Therefore, we want to ensure that the right structure is in place.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the scope for clarifying the terms of insurance cover for petrol filling stations. Compulsory insurance to cover the costs of remedial work is among the issues raised in a Green Paper from the Commission of the European Communities about paying for environmental damage. We are, of course, considering our response to the Green Paper. Once again, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are therefore addressing the problem he has raised.

But I should point out that insurance must be paid for. It is a form of contract between the insurers and the insured. I understand that the Association of British Insurers looked at the question of the terms of cover for environmental pollution. I also know that individual brokers are developing policies to meet needs for cover in this area. I am not sure that we should interfere in that process. Nor is it likely that there is, for the moment at least, the ambiguity to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I know that it is no comfort to the hon. Gentleman and to his constituents to know that the future should bring a more widely accepted solution to problems of past pollution. The problems of the hon. Gentleman's constituents are here and now. They are rightly exercised about why the problem developed and what will now be done to sort it out.

In the first instance, this is a matter for the West Lancashire district council. It has long-standing powers to tackle what are called "statutory nuisances". I understand that the council has done that to the extent of serving notices on the filling station owners who have now gone out of business.

As I said, we understand that West Lancashire district council has served abatement notices. That is, it has decided that these are problems within the scope of the legal powers conferred upon it by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. But it has found that the notices have not had the desired effect of getting the pollution cleared up by the persons responsible for it.

At this point, it is again for the council to decide whether the problem is in need of urgent action. It has the powers to take action itself to remedy the problems it described in the notices it served. It is for the council to explain why it has chosen not to act—if that is, indeed, its decision.

There are controls over petrol station operations. Prevention is obviously better than cure. All storage of petroleum has been controlled by licensing for many years. The Health and Safety Executive has issued guidance on appropriate conditions for licensing, including the testing of tanks. However, it has always been the policy that, in addition to physical testing of tanks, operators should have systems of continuous inventory control to show when petrol was being lost. I think that the short word for that is a dipstick. Most authorities make continuous inventory control a condition of licensing.

The hon. Gentleman has asked whether those controls can be tightened. I am aware that the Health and Safety Executive wrote in July 1990 to petroleum licensing authorities with interim guidance on tank testing and supply line testing. Tanks and lines are out of sight and, like all systems, deteriorate with age. That makes testing necessary but difficult. In particular, methods using water

[Mr. David Maclean]

tests proved costly and raised the problems of disposing of the contaminated water once the tank had been filled with it.

The interim guidance will be included in draft guidance and will be the subject of extensive public consultation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will respond to that public consultation, bearing in mind the points made about the costs to smaller operators if we go for a Rolls-Royce approach with knobs and bells on. That process should give rise to a system which will balance the costs of better testing and regulation against the benefits of greater confidence and control over pollution.

Therefore, there is a framework for action and a framework for prevention. But it is not for us to interfere with the way in which the council acts in such cases. The Government's job is to channel resources and advice. The hon. Gentleman asked about the resources available to small councils. We are doing a great deal to help the handling of such cases.

First, we have made resources available in the form of supplementary credit approvals to local authorities, whether large or small, to tackle contamination where there is a threat to human health. A local authority can apply to my Department for SCAs to fund the investigation of a case or for clean-up work where the private sector polluter cannot pay. It is open to West Lancashire council to make such an application, which will be considered fairly, on its merits, along with the others.

The council may be concerned about precisely how to tackle a particular problem. To that end, we prepare advice. There are several methods for the remediation of land contaminated by petrol and related substances. Such methods are of little use unless potential users like the council know about them. My Department is carrying out research to provide guidance on dealing with contamination of soil by a range of contaminants, including hydrocarbons such as petrol and diesel. We have already published some guidance.

In addition, the Institute of Petroleum has recently issued a useful "Code of Practice for the Investigation and Mitigation of Possible Petroleum-Based Land Contamination". My Department contributed comments during drafting, and the National Rivers Authority was represented on the editorial committee. Those are part of a broader programme of research into general contamination problems being carried out by the Department. Some other relevant research carried out by my Department includes a project to produce a framework for assessing the impact of contaminated land on groundwater and surface water, preparation of a screening protocol for contaminated land and participation in a major programme of research to produce guidance on remedial treatments sponsored by the Construction Industry Research and Information Association.

I have covered a lot of ground—I hope that the petrol has not—and I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman. We are aware of the pollution control problems which pose challenges at all levels—organisational, technical and scientific. We are trying to ensure that we get all of them in balance. We would not claim to have got all the answers, which is why we are conducting the wide-ranging review. But, for to-night, I hope that I have shown the hon. Members for Lancashire, West and for Warrington, South that West Lancashire district council has the means, if it wishes, to take care of the interests of the residents of Scarisbrick. The same would be true of incidents in Warrington. I hope that the council will contribute to the review that we are conducting.

Question put and agreed to.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing order.*

Adjourned at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 20 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM) BILL
Lords amendments agreed to.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM) (NO. 2) BILL
Lords amendments agreed to.

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Wednesday 26 May.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*
Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.
Debate to be resumed on Wednesday 26 May.

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Wednesday 26 May.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Constitutional Talks

1. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current state of the constitutional talks in Northern Ireland.

2. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the present status of the inter-party talks concerning Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): The Government are intent on promoting further political dialogue between the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish Governments, commencing as soon as practicable. I shall be seeking early meetings with the leaders of the Northern Ireland parties to hear their views on the way ahead. I also plan to discuss the matter with the Irish Government.

Mr. Riddick: Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in condemning the wholly pointless bomb in Belfast city centre this morning? Will he confirm that that sort of outrage will not affect any constitutional talks? Will he join me in urging the Dublin Government to condemn the terrorist disruption this morning?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I whole-heartedly and utterly join my hon. Friend in condemning this latest outrage. I have noted the contrast between yesterday and today. Yesterday, the people of Northern Ireland, on a universal suffrage, went to the polls; today, the IRA went for the people of Northern Ireland in an attempt to maim and murder at random and destroy their livelihoods. So much for the IRA's self-proclaimed campaign, the struggle for freedom.

I assure my hon. Friend of my belief that the Irish Government are as deeply opposed to this sort of outrage as we are, and our opposition is total. It will no doubt be a long fight, but it will not be the first one to which our country has stuck, and won.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: The whole House joins the right hon. and learned Gentleman in his condemnation of the bombings in Belfast this morning. I am sure that all hon. Members wish to convey our sympathies to those who have been maimed and injured. However, those bombings merely confirm the need for the democratic processes to be upheld and for the talks to continue. There is no place in our democracy for terrorists or terrorism.

What discussions has the right hon. and learned Gentleman had with the Irish Government—the co-sponsors of the talks—on the content of the proposals that he intends to present when the talks reconvene?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her opening remarks, which are heartening but not surprising. On the question of the constitutional and political talks, the resumption of those—or they might be described as further talks—represent the best way forward

in achieving the objectives that the House so overwhelmingly endorsed when my predecessor announced them in March 1991. It is important that we should now give some direction and focus to those talks and I propose, therefore, to table some propositions on behalf of the British Government.

The hon. Lady asked what consultation there has been. These will be British proposals, but, naturally enough, I wish to consult my opposite number in Dublin about the ideas that we shall put forward, although it will not be a joint paper. I was glad to see that, on 15 May in Washington, Mr. Spring said that we had been having an exchange of views.

He said:

"We have been in active contact and I have to say that I believe we are working very well together to try to get resumption of the dialogue."

Mr. Wilkinson: Is not the prerequisite to peace and political progress the unequivocal defeat of the Irish Republican Army? Is it not the case that so long as members of that organisation, with bombs and bullets, seek to maim and intimidate, democracy as we know it will be a fragile flower? Therefore, will my right hon. and learned Friend devote his energies wholly to the first priority, which is to ensure that terrorism is defeated and the IRA no longer poses a threat to freedom and liberty within the Province?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The elimination of terrorism is, indeed, the Government's first priority, and it will remain so. Democracy is a good deal stronger in Northern Ireland than my hon. Friend perhaps implies in his question. Those who are responsible for destroying the peace are relatively small in number, but are of unmatched evil in their character. The people of Northern Ireland are very resilient. They are determined to hold on to their democracy and they will do so. But the Government's primary purpose is to achieve the elimination of terrorists of whatever character, and that will remain the case.

Mr. Trimble: I am sure that the House will be glad to know that despite the bomb outside our party headquarters this morning, that headquarters is now back in operation and functioning. I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that any proposals that he brings forward will have to be based on more than wishful thinking. He will know from the last talks that we ran into some serious obstacles—obstacles that lie uniquely within the role of the two Governments and are uniquely for them to solve. I refer, of course, to the illegal territorial claim and the immoral diktat. I should be grateful, therefore, if the Secretary of State would let us know what progress he has made in defusing those obstacles.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The hon. Gentleman speaks, I think, of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution and of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Government remain committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and the British Government, together with the Irish Government, have jointly said that if, as a result of discussion and negotiation, it is possible to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement with another agreement or similar instrument that would carry broader support, they would welcome that.

As to articles 2 and 3, I welcome the fact that the Irish Government have said that they are prepared to initiate and bring forward legislation to amend articles 2 and 3 as part of an overall settlement of the process in which we are engaged.

Mr. McNamara: In his Liverpool speech, the Secretary of State reported that Metternich, on hearing of the death of a political opponent, asked, "What did he mean by that?" We put the same question when the Secretary of State talks about putting his proposals to the participants. When the Secretary of State makes his proposals, will he be merely stating those areas where he believes that the parties have been moving towards an agreement or will he be stating those areas where he feels that the parties should come to an agreement and where he has proposals to overcome difficulties or will he be creating new parameters for the talks, which he seemed to be doing in his Liverpool speech, abandoning the three-strand approach and the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The last point of the question causes me great surprise. I have made it abundantly clear that the Government remain committed to the three-strand approach and are not in the business of promoting a single-strand approach, first dealing with the internal arrangements of Northern Ireland. As to the remainder, I have already made it clear that the time has come for the British Government to accede to requests that they give some direction and focus to the talks if they are to take place. Accordingly, we shall put forward propositions to the parties first of all. Their purpose will be to build on the wide area of progress that was made last year and to make suggestions that may help people to come forward. It will not be a blueprint, but suggestions that may give some focus and direction to talks. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

Electricity Prices

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has had on the future price of electricity in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Robert Atkins): The Secretary of State and I have received representations from a number of bodies and individuals, notably the Action Group on Northern Ireland Electricity Prices, the Confederation of British Industry, the chairman of the consumer committee, and some Members of Parliament.

Mr. Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the regulatory framework for electricity now in place in Northern Ireland will ensure that efficiency and competition will drive down costs, and that reduced costs will lead to lower electricity prices—unlike the Opposition policy, which suggests that after achieving reduced costs, additional taxation should be imposed on utilities, which would make electricity more expensive?

Mr. Atkins: It is fair to say that Northern Ireland suffers in one respect in respect of energy, in that there is no opportunity to use gas there. The introduction of a gas interconnector in the not-too-distant future, together with the Scottish interconnector, will provide a great deal of extra resource and competition, which I hope will drive prices down.

Mr. William Ross: Surely the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) is completely wrong when he says that efficiency will drive down prices. Anyone who heard the statements on the prospectus issued the other day will know that it was said that electricity prices will rise considerably over the next four years. What prospect does that offer those attempting to attract industry to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Atkins: Such is the interest—which I hope will be fulfilled—in the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity that 600,000 people have already applied for the necessary details. I venture to suggest that a good number of them live in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, so I suggest that he should be a little cautious about being critical of what I am sure will prove to be a great success and yet another example of privatised industry being returned to those who ought to own it—all the consumers.

Mr. Stott: The Minister will recall that during the appropriation debate in February, I warned him that the Electricity Consumers Council in Northern Ireland had obtained information that electricity prices would rise by a massive 15 per cent. after privatisation—a fact which he refused to deny. Given that industrial and domestic electricity prices in Northern Ireland are already the highest in these islands, and from next year will attract 15 per cent. value added tax, how can the Minister justify pursuing the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity —when the business community does not want it, industry cannot afford it, and all the political parties in Northern Ireland have opposed it?

Mr. Atkins: The people—to the tune of 600,000 of them —appear to want it. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman ought to listen to that message.

Shopping Centres

4. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with retailers' organisations about future shopping centre developments in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: None as such. However, from time to time, I and my officials have had discussions with individual retail outlets about specific developments.

Mr. McAvoy: Will the Minister join me in congratulating the Northern Ireland Co-operative Development Agency on Creggan Enterprise and the work that it has done at the Rathmore centre in Londonderry? Does the Minister accept that he and his Administration need to do much more to encourage retailers, including the Co-operative Wholesale Society, to participate in shopping centres such as that at Rathmore and throughout Northern Ireland?

Mr. Atkins: I am pleased to offer my congratulations to any retail operation that wants to open in Northern Ireland. Recently, I visited the Co-op in Yorkgate in Belfast, which is a splendid location and one which I know will attract a lot of custom. That is true of many other organisations, such as Marks and Spencer, whose activities in Northern Ireland played a significant part in the results that it recently announced. We will do all that we can to attract retail developments, large or small. The hon. Gentleman is not entirely fair with his implicit criticism. If he speaks to those who are interested in such developments in Northern Ireland, he will find that they receive total support from us already.

Mr. Bellingham: Is my hon. Friend aware that most shopping centres in Northern Ireland are thriving in spite of terrorist attacks? Does he agree that the message from Northern Ireland is simple—the retailers of that Province will not give in to terrorism?

Mr. Atkins: As ever, my hon. Friend's statement is very helpful. I am not one to spend as much time in shops as my wife, who tells me that the city of Belfast has the best shopping centre that she has had the opportunity to visit, even allowing for centres in England. Yes, the message from Northern Ireland retailers the length and breadth of the Province is that they will not be deterred by the antics of the paramilitaries, business will go on and they will provide a first-rate service for all customers, wherever they come from.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While I welcome the development of retail centres, does the Minister accept that a lot of high street shopping exists, especially along the Newtownards, Woodstock and Lisburn roads and that it is important to keep such shopping in the community? Does he agree that the Government could help by ensuring that compensation bills are paid faster when traders are hit by IRA terrorists, to enable them to get back in business again?

Mr. Atkins: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Clearly, there is always room for improvement in the quality and variety of shops and we certainly wish to encourage that in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and everywhere else. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates), the Minister of State, will have heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks about compensation and if he has concerns, I am sure that my hon. Friend will be happy to discuss them.

Dr. Hendron: In regard to shopping centre development in Northern Ireland and in the centre of Belfast, I must also refer to the bomb that went off in Belfast city centre this morning on the edges of my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). Some people were injured there today. Will the Secretary of State join me in sympathising with them, the retailers, the official Unionist party—whose headquarters were damaged—and with those people responsible for promoting the beautiful grand opera house building, which was virtually destroyed by the Provos about one and a half years ago? That has happened once again and we all condemn them.

Mr. Atkins: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whose presence demonstrates that organisations that support terrorism will not win. I am grateful to him for his remarks, as is everyone in Belfast, which is a marvellous city. It is one of the great cities of the world and it has achieved remarkable success, is doing so now and will continue to do so, with the determination and resilience that sees off the sort of evil people who committed that offence today.

Constitutional Talks

5. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the resumption of the talks process concerning the future of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) earlier today.

Miss Lestor: Will the Secretary of State confirm that he will publish the proposals that he intends to present to the inter-party talks, so that there can be discussions on them in the House and beyond?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. I am sorry that I have to disappoint the hon. Lady. Last time round, we decided that the proceedings would be confidential and, on balance, that was a sensible decision, although it was not altogether one way. I am afraid that, at least at present, the answer is no.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many Conservative Members follow progress in Northern Ireland with great care? In those talks, would he welcome a positive contribution towards thinking and action to establish local authorities similar to those in the rest of the United Kingdom, with similar powers and responsibilities?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: There is a very widespread desire for the restoration of democratically answerable responsibility within Northern Ireland, and I certainly share that view. I want to divest myself of a large proportion of my powers and to see them shouldered by people who will answer democratically for them to the people of Northern Ireland. The precise form that such government shall take is at the centre of our discussions, so my hon. Friend can take heart that the restoration of democratic answerability in Northern Ireland is widely desired; the format is a matter for discussion.

Mr. Canavan: Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be a deplorable case of double standards if the British Government's constitutional proposals were to exclude any all-Ireland dimension but were to include proposals for some form of Parliament for a gerrymandered Province of six counties, especially when the same British Government are refusing a Parliament for the entire nation of Scotland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I think that the hon. Gentleman can be absolutely confident that there will be no gerrymandering, whatever the outcome of these discussions.

Mr. Dickens: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the good will that exists at the moment between Dublin, Belfast and London is as strong and as good as it has ever been for many, many years and that we ought to build on it? Is it not a fact that the Irish Guards are serving both south and north of the border? I should like to know when my right hon. and learned Friend last visited the Irish Guards.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I warmly endorse what my hon. Friend said about the co-operation between the two Governments. I pay tribute to the high degree of co-operation between, in particular, the Garda Siochana and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. As it so happens, I recently visited the Irish Guards. Whereas they are not exactly serving south of the border, the Irish Guards contain many officers and soldiers who live south of the border. As was made clear to me recently, they provide a very important component of that fine regiment.

Tourism

6. **Ms Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The Northern Ireland tourist board is making full use of its extensive powers and increased resources provided by the Government in 1992 to promote, market and develop Northern Ireland's tourism potential and to build even further on the success of the last few years.

Ms Hoey: I am sure that the Minister, like all of us, will want to congratulate the tourist board on the work that it has done in very difficult circumstances. May I add my view on this morning's events, in particular the problems that the Europa hotel will face? I am sure, however, that, like everything else, business will be as usual there. Does not the Minister realise, however, that the situation of people who come to Northern Ireland as tourists is made more difficult because of the high fares, which we have discussed in this place before? Does he welcome American Trans Air's scheduled flight between New York and Belfast? Will he also try to do something to bring down airport charges, which are much higher in Europe than in America? As part of the tourism drive, will he do something to get fares down, so that more people can travel backwards and forwards between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom and other parts of the world?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. That is why I am delighted, as she invites me to do, to welcome the new flight to New York. It will offer something that did not previously exist, even from the Republic—a direct flight from city to city. In addition, a new flight is to begin shortly, which is already operational in part, between Belfast city airport and Gatwick. Another flight is proposed from Belfast city airport to London docklands. A lot of competition is being generated, which is an indication of the desire of people from other parts of the United Kingdom to visit Northern Ireland, and visa versa. That is confirmed by the amount of activity across the sea in terms of the ferries and the competition and price reductions that are being offered as a result. In those circumstances, anything that we can do to reduce fares and charges we should like to do. However, as the hon. Lady will understand, these are matters as much for the European Community and the Civil Aviation Authority as they are for me. Nevertheless, I will certainly ensure that her point of view, which is shared by many others, is put to those bodies.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister bear in mind the extravagant charges at Belfast airport, as the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) said? Can he not do something to get the charges there down? The airport now charges for the number of seats on the aircraft, even though they are not all taken up, which creates difficulty for air carriers because of the expense.

Mr. Atkins: I am conscious of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. Clearly it is in everyone's interest that flying to Northern Ireland or using any other methods of transport should be as competitive as possible. That is why the resurgence of the new flights and services that are being offered from Belfast City airport and Aldegrove are so important. The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, which I shall consider.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is the Minister aware that I spent a day as a sort of tourist in Northern Ireland last week and that I did not find the permanent vehicle checkpoint on the road south of Newry an especially welcoming experience? Would any credible terrorist be daft enough to get caught in that permanent checkpoint? Would not it be better for tourism and local people and a better counter-terrorist policy to rely on random checkpoints rather than that type of hideous edifice?

Mr. Atkins: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman makes the point in that way; such comments do not contribute to our efforts to attract tourists. However, I welcomed his presence at the events that I was responsible for launching. He will understand, as a long-serving Member, that checkpoints are set up on the advice of the Chief Constable and that if there were no terrorist activity, there would be no need for them.

Unemployment

7. **Mr. Merchant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the main factors leading to the changes in unemployment levels in the Province between March and April.

9. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of unemployment.

Mr. Atkins: Figures released earlier today show that on 8 April 1993 there were 105,336 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland, which represents a decrease of 680 claimants compared with the previous month and a reduction of more than 2,600 since January. I have not yet made a detailed assessment, but I believe that the work of the various industrial development agencies has contributed to the welcome reduction.

Mr. Merchant: Does my hon. Friend agree that that is excellent news for a part of the United Kingdom which has always experienced high unemployment? Is not that strong evidence that Government economic policy is working to create jobs, which is reflected in other figures published today, and does it not give the lie to the claims of the Opposition, who always revel in doom and gloom on that issue?

Mr. Atkins: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend's last comment. In no sense are we complacent about the reduction in unemployment for the third month in a row. There are still substantial problems in finding new jobs, encouraging companies to locate in Northern Ireland and in expanding existing operations. However much the figure is reduced, it is still unacceptable and we will continue to work as hard as we can to ensure that we provide as many jobs for as many people in Northern Ireland as possible.

Mr. Cryer: Does not the attitude of Ministers show the incredible complacency and lack of care for the 3 million people who are in the misery dole queue created by their policies? When are the Government likely to reduce unemployment in Northern Ireland to its level of April 1979? The Government are fond of making comparisons with the previous Labour Government, but in 1979 there were 52,000 unemployed people in Northern Ireland, compared with 105,000 today. In 14 years, the Government have created more than twice as much unemployment in Northern Ireland. When are they going to get near the figures achieved by the last Labour Government?

Mr. Atkins: I should like the hon. Gentleman to come to Northern Ireland to see for himself the work that has been done to offer jobs, to create employment and to attract new companies to deal with the problems. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who pays careful attention to what Ministers say, will have heard my comment that we are not in any sense complacent about the welcome reduction. We are working as hard as we possibly can to ensure that other people do the same.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a double challenge: to continue to reduce the proportion of people who are out of work—17 per cent. six years ago at the height of boom and about 14 per cent. now—and to ensure that the difference between unemployment among the non-Roman Catholic and the Catholic populations reduces, as there is 8 per cent. unemployment among Protestants and Presbyterians whereas unemployment among Roman Catholics is far higher than average?

Mr. Atkins: I am conscious of my hon. Friend's concern about the balance of unemployment across the communities which, through the auspices of the "making Belfast work" initiative and other agencies, we are doing a great deal to address. There is no easy solution to the problem, but unless we try we shall never stand a chance, and my hon. Friend's support is gratefully received.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Minister agree that unemployment in Northern Ireland would be much higher were it not for the willingness of political parties in Northern Ireland to co-operate, talk and work together, and with industry? Does he believe that that is a much better solution to the problems of unemployment than phoney circus talks?

Mr. Atkins: I can confirm that the right hon. Gentleman's support and that of his colleagues and all representatives from Northern Ireland in this place is very much welcomed by a wide variety of those who wish to invest and the agencies which are encouraging other people to invest. His support is most important in this context and I hope that it will continue. I do not think that he would expect me to be drawn on his latter comment, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will have heard. My task is to ensure that the economy improves, and the support of all the parties and their representatives is vital in that.

Brook Advisory Centres

8. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding is given by his Department to the Brook advisory centres.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The Department of Health and Social Services does not directly fund advisory centres. However, the Brook advisory centre in Belfast is funded by the Eastern health and social services board which received a grant of £30,000 in 1991-92 and £31,350 in 1992-93. Funding is expected to continue at a similar level this year.

Mrs. Winterton: Why is my hon. Friend's Department supporting an organisation which promotes teenage promiscuity, thereby leading to more conceptions and abortions, when its presence in Northern Ireland is vociferously opposed by hon. Members from the Province, 12 local authorities, both the Free Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Democratic Unionist party? Will my hon. Friend ensure that the relevant hospital board ceases to channel funds to that unwelcome organisation, which is damaging the moral and physical welfare of youngsters by its activities?

Mr. Hanley: Health and social service boards have a responsibility to secure provision for family planning services to meet the needs of their resident populations. The Eastern board has identified a clear need for sexually active young people to have access to contraceptive advice and services. Within the board's area at present there are about 600 births per year to teenage mothers, about 84 per cent. of whom are unmarried. The centre has identified a need and, while it acts within the law, the Government will not close it down.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the Minister emphasise that access to good family planning will stop unwanted teenage births? Those who talk all the time about trying to remove funding for clinics such as the Brook are contributing to the very problem which they pretend to decry.

Mr. Hanley: That is indeed the intention of the Eastern health and social services board.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Has the Minister read the literature that the Brook clinic is giving out? Is it Government policy to advocate that young people should not take their parents into their confidence?

Mr. Hanley: As I have said, as long as the Brook clinic acts within the law there is no reason for the Government to order the Eastern health and social services board to close it. In the six months since the clinic has been in operation, it has received 344 visits from people seeking advice and 600 telephone calls, in spite of the fact that a number of people have been trying to keep callers out of the building. I believe that the service is needed and, statutorily, it is being provided. However, if any breaches of the law occur, the Government will not hesitate to close it down.

Constitutional Talks

10. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the resumption of the inter-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

11. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will outline the proposals which he intends to present at the inter-party talks relating to Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick).

It would be wrong to reveal in advance of further confidential talks the outline proposals which the Government may table as a basis for discussion. I shall seek to set a direction and focus to resumed talks by tabling proposals which seem most likely to build usefully on the progress made last year towards agreement. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I would be much obliged if the House would settle down and if conversations could be much quieter.

Mr. McAllion: If the inter-party talks fail to produce a positive outcome in terms of an institutionalised all-Ireland dimension, will the Secretary of State confirm that it is not the Government's policy to seek to impose an internal solution in Northern Ireland?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I do not approach these matters on the basis that they will fail or on hypothetical circumstances. I and the enormous number of people whom I meet in Northern Ireland—especially the business community—wish the process to succeed. That is the positive way to advance.

Mr. Pickthall: Is the Secretary of State confident that the proposals that he will make cannot or will not be portrayed as pre-conditions or pre-determinants? Further, is he confident that all the relevant parties will take part in the talks without pre-conditions?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am entirely confident that the proposals of which I have spoken will not be seen as conditions, a blueprint, a template or anything like that. They are exactly as I have described them—proposals which are designed to give a sense of direction and focus for talks which I trust will take place.

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in view of the further bomb outrage of the past 24 hours outside the Unionist headquarters in Belfast, it is vital that there is an early resumption of the inter-party talks to find a permanent political solution to the problems?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I draw the House's attention once again to the contrast between yesterday's events, when the people of Northern Ireland exercised their democratic rights in free and democratic universal suffrage, and today's events, when the terrorists sought to destroy the people of Northern Ireland, knowing that they cannot achieve their political ends by any means other than violence, or so they believe, but they are wrong about that.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Government will not be bombed and bullied into making proposals which would result in the majority of people of Northern Ireland having to accept a situation that they would find offensive?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Everyone concerned has agreed that there is no possibility of a successful outcome to our search for an overall political settlement unless it is an outcome that will secure the agreement of a wide range of the population. There has to be very widespread agreement if it is to be durable and workable. That is what we are looking for and what I hope we shall achieve.

Mr. McNamara: The Secretary of State said that he will be giving direction and focus in his proposals, based on the areas of agreement which he believes were reached in the previous talks. What were those areas of agreement?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Substantial progress was made in a number of directions, and a number of things happened which, a few years ago, would never have been thought possible—some Unionists went to Dublin and Irish Ministers came to Stormont and participated in talks that lasted for many weeks. I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might find it in his heart to welcome those things and even to congratulate those who shared responsibility for them. I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman might find it in his heart to express a little pleasure that so many new things happened, which were wholly constructive and advantageous in character. I hope that that progress will be resumed.

Sunday Trading

12. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent review he has undertaken of the practice of Sunday trading in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There have been no recent reviews of Sunday trading in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that as long as Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom—and it will continue to remain a part of the United Kingdom for as long as its people want—any future legislation made in the House concerning Sunday trading should also apply to the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend is right in saying that Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom. However, this matter has been dealt with in the countries on an individual basis. If there is a change in the law on Sunday trading in England and Wales it could give rise to a review of the law in Northern Ireland, but Northern Ireland deals with this matter in its own way, and local consultation will be supremely important.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister agree that more people in Northern Ireland are concerned not about the increase in Sunday trading, but about the practice of providing three months' employment for four hours a week and the turnover of cheap labour that is destroying some of the economy?

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman is right. Many issues cover the Sunday trading problem and there is no doubt that trading practices in general should be looked at continually, but, again, we should take local considerations into account.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Prime Minister recall his big idea of the citizens charter, aimed at giving individuals swift redress? Can he explain why veterans of the atomic tests which took place on Christmas island and elsewhere over 30 years ago, who suffered the horrendous effects of radiation, have still not received compensation? People in the United States who suffered in a similar way have been compensated. The Prime Minister assured the House as long ago as 4 December 1990, in reply to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins), that the matter was to receive his urgent attention.

The Prime Minister: Yes. About 10 days ago I wrote again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing and other hon. Members who expressed an interest in the matter. We are still waiting for medical reports on which we can make our judgments. I have sought to have the medical reports expedited, but there is further examination to be done. As soon as these medical reports are received we can reach a decision.

Q2. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Following his statement yesterday, can my right hon. Friend confirm that, contrary to earlier interpretations of the Maastricht treaty and its protocols, he is now advised that the opt out from monetary union extends to the exchange rate mechanism and that Britain has no obligation, under the terms of the treaty, to re-enter the exchange rate mechanism unless and until we decide to seek to enter a single European currency?

The Prime Minister: Yes. In essence my hon. Friend is quite right. I have had no fresh advice, but that has always been the position. Nothing in the Maastricht treaty obliges us to rejoin the exchange rate mechanism. What the treaty does is make it explicitly clear that we retain responsibility for monetary policy in stages 2 and 3 of economic and monetary union as long as we do not participate in a single monetary policy. As my hon. Friend knows, because of the opt out that I negotiated at Maastricht, we would not enter into a single currency until and unless the House had specifically approved it.

Mr. John Smith: Can the Prime Minister give the House a guarantee that the Government will not make millions of pensioners and children pay for prescriptions?

The Prime Minister: I had optimistically thought that the right hon. and learned Gentleman might welcome a third successive fall in unemployment, but I should perhaps have known him better. May I explain to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—so that there is no doubt

either to him or millions of people throughout the country —exactly the review that is taking place on public expenditure? My answer to every scare story that the right hon. and learned Gentleman produces will be the same —I hear that he was peddling them earlier today.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has been instructed to examine all our public expenditure to ensure that it is well targeted and that it delivers value for money, and to see where savings in taxpayers' money can be found. However, he knows that in doing so he must protect the position of the most vulnerable members of society, and that is what he is doing. At the moment, my right hon. Friend is being presented with options. He has not yet considered the options or selected those worth further consideration.

No decisions have been made, and no decision is imminent. Decisions will not be made until the public expenditure round in the autumn. Many options will need to be discarded, but we need to examine public expenditure, and we shall both maintain our manifesto commitments and protect the most vulnerable people in society. Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman will now give up his tedious weekly shroud waving.

Mr. John Smith: I should have known better than to expect a straight answer from the Prime Minister. No one in the country will know whether his answer means yes or no. The Prime Minister talks about his manifesto commitments; may I remind him that millions of ordinary families are already deeply worried about having to pay another £8·50 per week next year and even more the year after, despite his tax pledges. Now families face the threat of an additional tax on being ill. Why are the Government so intent on making ordinary families in this country pay the price of their economic incompetence?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman really should not peddle those scare stories and frighten people. I have made it absolutely clear that we shall protect vulnerable members of society. "We should be prepared to re-examine everything; I have not ruled anything out"—*[Interruption.]* Those are not my words but those of the right hon. and learned Gentleman when he was speaking about his review of social policy.

Mr. John Smith: Just over a year ago the Prime Minister promised lower taxes and no cuts in public expenditure. We know that he has broken one promise already, and clearly he is planning to break another. Is it any wonder that no one any longer believes anything that he says?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should stop trying to frighten vulnerable people for his own party advantage. I say to him in all friendliness that it will do him no good in the end. We shall honour our manifesto commitments. Since the general election the right hon. and learned Gentleman has publicly junked all his manifesto commitments. The contrast is obvious, and the public will know which party keeps its promises, for its members sit here, and which party seeks week after week to frighten people with scare stories, for its members sit over there.

Q3. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kynoch: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the seasonally adjusted unemployment figures show a further fall this month, for the third month in a row? Does he agree that that is a further welcome sign that the recovery is starting to work through to where we all want to see it, in the jobcentres and in a meaningful and stable reduction in unemployment?

The Prime Minister: Yes, that is welcome to everyone. There are those who mention unemployment when it is going down as well as when it is going up. Unemployment is still too high, but today's figures offer further hope for unemployed people. Not only has unemployment now fallen for the third month in a row, but the number of people employed in manufacturing industry has risen for the third consecutive month, and the number of new vacancies notified to jobcentres is more than it was a year ago. If the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) wishes to continue with his smears, perhaps he will put up or shut up.

Mr. Foulkes: Following the Tory party conference in Scotland, is the Prime Minister aware of the extent of opposition to water privatisation in Scotland, even among Conservatives? Will he now end the uncertainty and give a clear and unequivocal pledge that there will be no privatisation of water in Scotland?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has made the point that he wished to make, and he knows as well as I do that the options are set out in the consultation paper "Investing for the Future". We are considering those options. When we have finished our considerations, we shall announce the result.

Q4. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will my right hon. Friend confirm his view, stated during the last election, that first-past-the-post is the best electoral system; one which has served us well for centuries? Is it not typical of Opposition Members to want to introduce a proportional representation system —a desire reinforced by their decision to abstain on the historically important European vote this evening?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that I remain in favour of the first-past-the-post system. I am against proportional representation, and I do not need a referendum to tell me what my view on the matter should be.

Q5. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir David Steel: Has the Prime Minister been able to examine the workings of the community care schemes since they came into operation on 1 April? Is the confusion and anxiety as great in Huntington as it is elsewhere? Will he promise a full review of the schemes at the end of the first three months of working?

The Prime Minister: The scheme is, with the consent of hon. Members in all parts of the House and people throughout the community care system, a great advance. People have wanted care in the community for a long time, and they now have it. It is a very substantial change. We shall, of course, keep the matter under review to make sure that it is working satisfactorily. There are bound to be some difficulties at the beginning of a change on this scale. It is a welcome change, one for which we have looked for many years, and we intend it to be a success.

Q6. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the increasing suffocation of London by heavy traffic, which is now damaging job prospects in the capital? Will he accept the congratulations of my constituents in Ealing and of the whole of London on his determination to go ahead with the crossrail project? Will the Government do everything possible to expedite the passage of the enabling measure through the House? May we have an assurance that the construction of the project, which will bring jobs to all parts of London, including Ealing, will start yesterday, if possible?

The Prime Minister: That might be rather difficult. Crossrail is important for London and for jobs throughout the country, and I know that it will be particularly welcome to hon. Members with London constituencies. It will be a joint venture with the private sector and my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill will take place in the House next month. Crossrail will obviously make a dramatic difference to London's transport system, as will the Jubilee line extension, to which the Government are also committed —*[Interruption.]*—as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is heckling, may wish to know.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: The Prime Minister may recall that I wrote to him on 30 March about assisted area status for London. I have since received a holding reply. He will know that if London were to receive assisted area status, the support of the Government would be needed and that 13 London boroughs, including Lewisham, would be affected. When will the right hon. Gentleman be in a position to give me a positive reply?

The Prime Minister: I very much hope that we will be able to reach a decision on changes to the assisted areas map before too long. We are well advanced with our examination of it and are looking at the various criteria that need to be considered. I would certainly hope that we would have a decision, and announce it, well before the House rises for the summer.

Q7. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Winterton: I warmly welcome the reduction in unemployment for the third consecutive month, for which Government policies are in part responsible. Will my right hon. Friend give me, the House and the people of this country an assurance that he will not undermine the recovery in our economy by re-entering the exchange rate mechanism? In addition, will he give the pensioners and children of this country an assurance that he will not permit prescriptions to be paid for by the retired or by the young?

The Prime Minister: I warmly welcome part of my hon. Friend's question: I share his pleasure at the fall in unemployment. We now have the right conditions which I hope will lead to a consistent fall in unemployment. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members who are saying that the figures are a fiddle may be interested to know that the Department's director of statistics, a civil servant, today issued a statement which said:

"I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of the claimant count figures."

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) may sit there giggling and making accusations, but he ought not to attack public officials who are not in a position to answer back.

My hon. Friend will have heard me say earlier this week that we had no imminent intention of returning to the exchange rate mechanism because the circumstances for doing so were by no means appropriate at present. As for his second question, he clearly heard the detailed statement that I made to the House some moments ago.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Yes, Madam. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 24 MAY—Progress on the remaining stages of the Railways Bill.

TUESDAY 25 MAY—Completion of remaining stages of the Railways Bill.

Motion on the British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order.

WEDNESDAY 26 MAY—Second Reading of the Welsh Language Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 27 MAY—Debates on the Adjournment.

It may also be for the convenience of the House to know that the provisional business for the first week back after the spring Adjournment will be as follows:

MONDAY 7 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill.

Motion relating to the Welsh Language Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 8 JUNE—Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order 1993.

Motions relating to the Legal Aid (Northern Ireland) Regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 9 JUNE—Opposition day (13th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced—and, for all I know, decided.

Motion on the Council Tax Limitation (England) (Maximum Amounts) Order.

THURSDAY 10 JUNE—Estimates day (2nd allotted day). There will be a debate on administration, in so far as it relates to the Department of National Heritage's expenditure on the legislative framework and general arrangements for the press. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 11 JUNE—There will be a debate to take note of improved productivity in UK manufacturing on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows: Tuesday 25 May—Committee B, document No. 11096/92 relating to the safety and efficiency of nuclear power stations in non-member countries. Wednesday 26 May—Committee A, document No. 11011/92 relating to the future development of the common transport policy; Committee B, various documents relating to carbon/energy tax, details to be given in the *Official Report*. Wednesday 9 June—Committee A, documents Nos. 10344/91 and 5019/93 relating to marketing standards for milk and non-milk fats; Committee B, document No. 4180/93 relating to prospecting for and extraction of hydrocarbons.

[Tuesday 25 May:

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community Document:

11096/92 Community aid to promote nuclear safety in eastern Europe

Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee:

HC 79-xxv (1992-93).

Wednesday 26 May:

European Standing Committee A

Relevant European Community Document:

11011/92 Transport policy

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee:

HC 79-xxiii (1992-93) and HC 79-xxvii (1992-93).

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community Documents:

7018/92
8328/92
4182/93
7847/92
+COR1
7757/92
7569/92
5705/93
7157/92
SEC(92) 1996

} *Carbon/Energy Tax*

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee:

HC 79-vii (1992-93), HC 79-xx (1992-93), HC 79-xviii (1992-93), HC 79-xxvi (1992-93), HC 79-xxix (1992-93), HC 79-xv (1992-93).

Wednesday 9 June:

European Standing Committee A

Relevant European Community Community Documents:

10344/91
5019/93

} *Marketing standards for fats*

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee:

HC 24-xiv (1991-92) and HC 79-xxiv (1992-93).

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community Document:

4180-93 Licensing of exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons

Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee:

HC 79-xxi (1992-93).

Tuesday 8 June:

Legal Aid Regulations:

Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (S.I. No. 121);

Legal Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (S.I. No. 123);

Legal Aid (Assessment of Resources) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (S.I. No. 122);

Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) (S.I. No. 124).

Thursday 10 June:

Estimates Day: class XI, vote 7, Department of National Heritage:

Administration; the fourth report from the National Heritage Committee, Session 1992-93, on privacy and media intrusion (HC 294) is relevant.]

Mr. Brown: I shall put to the Leader of the House a number of requests with which I am afraid he will be all too familiar.

May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for continuing the practice of giving us more than a week's notice of the business ahead? It is widely appreciated in all parts of the House, and I urge him to continue with it. However, the Government need to be flexible in these matters. Therefore, may I ask him not to rule out a statement or debate in Government time on the situation in the former Yugoslavia?

May I also draw the Leader of the House's attention to the fact that on 28 January, and again on 25 February, I asked when we could expect the usual one-day debate on the Government's public expenditure plans? In view of today's 34 per cent. increase in Government borrowing April to April to cover the PSBR, is it not astonishing that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is not willing to come to the House of Commons and share his problems with us?

May I ask the Leader of the House again for a debate on the defence estimates and for the Government to find time to discuss the affairs of Scotland, notably water privatisation and the so-called stocktaking exercise?

When does the right hon. Gentleman intend to bring forward proposals concerning the allocation of the six extra European Parliamentary seats and to explain how the legitimate expectations of the Boundary Commission to be involved in the process will be met?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman, perhaps understandably—I suppose it has the merit of consistency, which we do not always see—has repeated a number of the demands that his right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made last week. On several of them, including the requests he made in relation to Scotland, the extra European parliamentary seats and the Government's public expenditure plans, there is not very much I can add to what I said to the right hon. Lady last week.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's comments about my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary were a bit unreasonable, given that the Chief Secretary came to the House and made a statement and has certainly spoken in a number of debates since the public expenditure reviews, to which some reference has been made recently, were set in hand.

If it seemed right or necessary, of course the Government would arrange for statements to be made on the former Yugoslavia, or indeed elsewhere, should developments during the recess make that necessary.

I am rather more sympathetic to the learned Gentleman's request for a debate on the defence estimates than I am to some of his other requests, as I have already signalled to his right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South. I realise that I have not been able to require that desire in what I have announced today, but I am looking for ways of meeting it in the not too distant future.

I thank the learned Gentleman for the kind words he said at the beginning of his remarks. It will not always be possible, but I am certainly working towards giving the House as much advance notice as I can of its business.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is increasing concern up and down the country at what Sir John Banham and his commission are doing? May we please have an early debate on his proposals for Derbyshire? If he is proposing the creation of maxi district councils throughout the country, he will meet with opposition throughout the country.

Mr. Newton: I cannot be as forthcoming to my hon. Friend as he would wish. However, I cannot do badly because, last Tuesday, immediately after having to listen to the spring Adjournment motion debate in which my hon. Friend made a similar point, I went to the CBI annual dinner, and, lo and behold, I found myself talking at some length to Sir John Banham, so I was able to tell him that some of my hon. Friends had expressed reservations about his proposals. It was not a public conversation, but I hope that Sir John will not mind my saying in general terms that he said that he is always willing to listen to representations.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Irrespective of what side of the argument hon. Members are on, it is generally agreed on both sides of the House that the public are bewildered by the incomprehensible procedural wrangling surrounding the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. Now that that process is beginning to wind down—I hope this evening—does the Leader of the House think that it is time to look at the way in which the House does its business? Can he assure the House that he will arrange for a statement or, better still, time for debate to try to get a bit of sanity into the way in which the House works?

Mr. Newton: I suspect that, at times, it is not only those outside who have been bemused by some of the procedures of the House. It would be rash for me—indeed for anyone who may hold this office—to undertake to sort out all the tangles to the extent that the hon. Gentleman thinks right. If there are lessons to be learnt, we shall try to learn them. The Chairman of the Procedure Committee is not in his place, but I am sure that he will be turning his fertile mind to ways of making further improvements.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Can my right hon. Friend announce today a date for the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill?

Mr. Newton: I may have given my hon. Friend an informal indication of it. He may have noted that I announced that, on Tuesday 8 June, the Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at 7 o'clock. What is named for private business is a matter for the Chairman of Ways and Means, but I would be somewhat surprised if that did not prove to be the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): The Leader of the House has made very welcome arrangements in the past for announcing recess dates. Can he tell the House why he has not yet announced the date at the end of July? Is it to be another pawn in the Maastricht negotiations with the Lords? Can he tell us when the House will rise?

Mr. Newton: I would not seek to make the hon. Gentleman, whom I much respect, a pawn in any negotiations, but I acknowledge that there are a number of uncertainties about the progress of important business which lead me to be cautious before proceeding in quite the way that the hon. Gentleman would like.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the concerns expressed about the risks to occupational pension schemes, perhaps personified by the disaster that overcame the Maxwell pensioners. Will he make time for a debate in which we can explore various ideas on how those schemes might be strengthened and come up with a way to provide a safety net for pensioners who may suffer when schemes fail?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise time for a debate. My hon. Friend, who has taken a close and significant interest in these matters over many months, will know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has shown himself willing to consider ways to make improvements in this sector. As it happens, my right hon. Friend will be here to answer questions on Monday 7 June.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Bearing in mind the Prime Minister's failure earlier to answer the question about prescription charges, and the fact that the Tories have already increased those charges by more than 2,000 per cent. since they came to power, may we have an early statement giving us a categorical assurance that the Government have abandoned any move to reduce further eligibility for free prescriptions? Why should sick pensioners and the parents of sick children be expected to bail out this discredited Government?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend made absolutely clear the position on the question that was raised. I will not add to it.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): Will my right hon. Friend make time at an early moment for a debate on the reaction of some local authorities to compulsory competitive tendering? I ask that question for three reasons: first, so that I might draw to the attention of the House the unlawful termination of a grass cutting contract by Labour-controlled Plymouth city council, which was won lawfully in 1990 under compulsory competitive tendering by a company named Krinkles, the termination of which, in my view, is the greatest public scandal——

Madam Speaker: Order. Although the House may be interested in the hon. Gentleman's views on other occasions, this is not the moment for him to put them. If he would like to put his point briefly, I am sure that the Leader of the House will respond. His question must be brief, and he does not need to argue his case.

Mr. Streeter: May we have an urgent debate on the important matter of this unlawful termination, costing my constituents £750,000?

Mr. Newton: While I am not fully familiar with the details of the case to which my hon. Friend refers, it certainly sounds as if it may well merit a debate. However, much as I might wish to offer one, I must be mindful of the fact that we had a debate, I think on a Friday, on local government matters only a few weeks ago. Happily, my hon. Friend may have an opportunity to raise the matter soon, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is due to answer questions on Wednesday 26 May.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Leader of the House aware of the suggestion in today's press that the Government intend to change the law to remove the protection of workers who were automatically moved from either state or local government units into the private sector without their agreement? Will he please undertake to ensure that the Secretary of State who is responsible makes a public announcement in the House if any such suggestion is to be pushed?

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, as with any of my right hon. Friends, would make any statement that it was felt was appropriate in relation to any proposal that they felt it right to present. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that my right hon. Friend to whom she refers, the Secretary of State for Employment, will be here for questions even earlier than the Secretary of State for the Environment—that is to say, on Tuesday 25 May.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I welcome the verdict of the jury which vindicated the actions of three police officers in bringing to task those responsible for the Guildford bombings. Can my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on compensation for those officers, who have suffered traumatic experiences?

Mr. Newton: Once again, I do not think that it would be possible for me to promise time for such a debate, but I shall bring my hon. Friend's suggestion to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Why is the Leader of the House shrugging off the demand for a debate on the privatisation plans for Scottish water? Is he aware that his Scottish Office colleagues are briefing the Scottish press in private about their latest indications on the matter? If the Tory party wants to swallow Scottish water in two gulps rather than one, would not it be wise to share those views and test the temperature of the House first?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's question hangs on the request for a debate. I have said a number of times in recent weeks, indeed several times to the hon. Gentleman, although I understand why he continues to be so persistent, that the appropriate time for a debate is when the Government have some proposals. At the moment the Government are still considering the results of the consultation.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware that there is great concern in Northern Ireland about the proposed closure of many hospitals, including one of the largest maternity hospitals in Belfast, the Jubilee. I am sure that he is also aware of early-day motion 1798 on the subject which has been signed by the leader of the Ulster Unionist party and me and by Belfast Members.

[That this House deplores the intended removal by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board of patients' choice for maternity services at the Belfast Jubilee Maternity Hospital when that hospital already complies with all of the quality, safety and other criteria laid down by the Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services, and

reflected in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board's own Prospectus for the Purchase of Maternity Services; and considers that this is contrary to the Patient's Charter.]

If he is not able to arrange a debate, will he refer this matter to the Northern Ireland Committee? Will he explain to the House how that Committee functions and how we can get business before it? On a previous occasion when I put a matter to the right hon. Gentleman, it was evidently scratched by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and we were not allowed to discuss it.

Mr. Newton: I shall leave aside the comments at the end of the hon. Gentleman's question. I am not sure whether he had an opportunity to ask my right hon. and learned Friend about the matter during today's Northern Ireland questions, but I can confirm that I have received his request for a meeting of the Committee. At the moment I can only say that I want to assess what support there is among Northern Ireland Members before considering whether that would be an appropriate step.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): Does the Leader of the House agree that, if a fragile economic recovery is under way, nothing should happen to prevent it from developing? In the light of that, will he ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to take an early opportunity, possibly next Tuesday, to make a statement about the position in the Southampton container terminal, which is on the verge of an industrial dispute provoked by the determination of management to sack workers and bring in casual workers?

The House must be given the opportunity to debate the threat to industrial peace from that sort of management action, which includes the recruitment of casual labour who have been asked whether they would be willing to cross picket lines. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the House should discuss whether that sort of macho management is what this country needs when economic recovery may be getting under way?

Mr. Newton: I doubt whether I could or should promise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will make a statement. However, as the hon. Gentleman implied in his question—and as I have already told another hon. Member—my right hon. Friend will be here to answer questions next Tuesday. I can now predict one question and so ensure that my right hon. Friend is forewarned.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Will my right hon. Friend provide time for an early debate on the improvement in Britain's economic position? Is it not correct that the fall in unemployment that we have welcomed today is the result not only of the Government's current economic policy, but of the supply-side reforms of the 1980s? Is not this a useful opportunity to tell the House and the country that sustainable economic growth can come only from deregulated, free-market economics—something that only Conservative Members believe in?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend hardly needs me to say that I am sympathetic to his proposition. Indeed, I had thought of making similar comments in response to the previous question. I am glad to say that, just before coming here this afternoon, I had the pleasure of being present at a function—*[Interruption.]*—related to the motor industry—*[Interruption.]* It was a caring organisation concerned with providing residential care. At that function, it was clear that the motor industry was in a distinctly optimistic frame of mind.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a further statement on the coal industry and the closure of pits? Does he recall that, when we debated the White Paper, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced that a number of pits would be kept open on a care and maintenance basis? Is he aware that there has been a conspiracy between the Government and British Coal to shut those pits? Many miners are being offered redundancy payments which, if they do not take them on the spot, will be reduced by more than half later in the year, in compliance with the law of the land. Is it not high time that that conspiracy was broken?

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the women who camped on Abingdon green, outside the House of Commons, the other day were told by the people with cameras that they had been instructed by the Government that in no circumstances should they take pictures of those women, who were protesting against the illegal closures?

Mr. Newton: I suppose that I must say—although, once again, I feel that it is hardly necessary—that I wholly reject the allegations that the hon. Gentleman so freely throws around about conspiracies of one sort or another. Frankly, his concerns would be a good deal more credible if he did not lard them with such silly allegations.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will it be possible in the near future to have a debate on the need for continued restraint in public expenditure during which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary can be made aware of the fact that, based on current trends, it is likely that in the not too distant future more people will be employed in central and local government than in manufacturing industry?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be well aware that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is aware of concerns of the kind that he has expressed about public expenditure, and that is precisely why he is engaged on the reviews that appear to have led to some controversial speculation.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The usual question, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Newton: The answer is not quite as usual. For those who are not part of the group that takes part in these exchanges, may I say that this is about Members' interests. I hope that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Members' Interests will not mind my saying that I had a further word with him last night on the convenient timing of a debate. However, at present I cannot give an exact date.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of the Second Reading of the Crossrail Bill on 8 June. May we have a debate on roads next week so that I can raise the important matter of the proposed closure of part of Berkley avenue in my constituency, which is opposed by thousands of my constituents and myself, and on which we are awaiting the decision of the Department of Transport inspector who conducted an inquiry many months ago? We need his decision. May we have a debate so that I might secure it.

Mr. Newton: No one would be more surprised than my hon. Friend were I to promise the debate that he seeks, but I hope that he will take it in the friendly spirit that it is meant if I draw his attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Transport will be here more or less continuously next Monday and Tuesday, either answering questions or dealing with the remaining stages of the Railways Bill. Thus, on a number of public and private occasions, my hon. Friend may have an opportunity to nobble him.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Leader of the House consider arranging an urgent debate on the way in which the unemployment figures are compiled? The Prime Minister again today evaded a question on the serious things that are happening in the way in which the unemployment figures are put together, and the Secretary of State for Employment is signally trying to avoid a dialogue with me on the question of people who are clearly not sick and who are being diverted from the unemployment benefit list to the sickness benefit list. That is undermining the community health service as doctors are being inundated with pro forma forms from the Department of Employment to be completed in order to give a sick note to people who are clearly well. That is a fiddle, and the three months' good figures really are not so good after all.

Mr. Newton: I sometimes find it a bit strange that at almost one and the same time we hear such allegations together with allegations which are often thrown at the Secretary of State for Social Security about how the Government are attempting to take people off invalidity benefit by subjecting them to medical examinations.

Mr. Lewis: People are being taken off the unemployment benefit list and put on the sickness benefit list.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has put his question—and a long one it was, too.

Mr. Newton: If there is evidence, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, or for that matter my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, if it is for him, will consider it. As for the rest, my right hon. Friend made it clear that the Department's director of statistics has issued a statement, not on Ministers' behalf but on his own, saying that he has no reason to doubt the accuracy of the claimant count figures for recent months. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to attack an independent public official in relation to such a statement, let him do so, but we on the Conservative Benches will not join in.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is getting a little tired of colleagues asking for a debate on the Jopling report on the sittings of the House, but can he say whether we might have an early debate on that and whether he has had replies from other parties to the request that they should put forward what they believe should happen after the Jopling report so that we can, as a House of Commons, move forward together in a non-party political way?

Mr. Newton: I know that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who is unable to be here today, put some propositions some time ago and is aware of the desire in all parts of the House to make some progress. She has told me that she is aware of that, and I await further developments.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that in the past week relatives of those who died in the Waco fire have received notification that the bodies are now ready to be returned to Britain, but they have been informed that they may be asked to raise between £2,000 and £3,000 in order to bring the bodies back to Britain for burial here? Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that there must be a number of constituents like my own who are pensioners or widows with no savings for whom that would be an impossible burden? When I contacted the Foreign Office——

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that these are business questions. He does not have to develop his case but must merely ask a question of the Leader of the House and explain in two sentences why he wants a debate next week.

Mr. Simpson: Can the Foreign Secretary make a statement about a more appropriate system of supporting families who have the right to bury their deceased in this country?

Mr. Newton: I will certainly bring the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I do not wish to ask my usual question about the Shops (Amendment) Bill. Will the Leader of the House consider between now and the time the House returns from the Whitsun recess arranging for a statement to be made on whether the Government intend to go ahead with the Jubilee line? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a number of hon. Members are still without proper offices, and that the Accommodation and Works Committee spent five years devising a plan for the phase 2 development? It is still awaiting a reply and a decision from the Government regarding the Jubilee line. It is high time that the Government made a decision on that matter, in the way that they did yesterday in respect of the crossrail link.

Mr. Newton: A number of the hon. Gentleman's questions were rhetorical because he knows—given that we have attended the same meetings—that I am well aware of the points that he raised. I imagine that he heard the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister about the Jubilee line extension in Prime Minister's Question Time half an hour ago. Obviously, I am not in a position to add to them.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the possible consequences of the record level of national debt on the sick and poor of this country? Is he aware that many people listened carefully to the remarks of the Chief Secretary last night, which were on the record—no scaremongering? We should have a full debate to reassure the country. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware also that the Chief Secretary's statement is a measure of the Government's mismanagement of the economy by relying too much on receipts from privatisation and neglecting manufacturing industry?

Mr. Newton: I certainly do not accept the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question, given that his party persistently demands greater expenditure than any allocated to almost anything at any moment—with the possible exception of defence expenditure. When defence spending is reduced, the hon. Gentleman's party complains about that as well. I do not find the hon. Gentleman's remarks very credible, and I will not add to the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister a few moments ago.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Speaker: Order. We must move on.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I must strike a balance between business questions and the debate that is to follow. An unprecedented number of right hon. and hon. Members want to take part in that debate. Business questions have run for more than half an hour, and that is quite long enough. If right hon. and hon. Members had been speedier in putting their questions, and if the responses had been brisker, I would have been able to call more Members. We must learn lessons from that.

Adjournment (Whitsun)

Madam Speaker: I remind right hon. and hon. Members that on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday 27 May up to nine right hon. and hon. Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their own choice. Applications should reach my office by 10pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning and the result made known as soon as possible thereafter.

Northern Ireland Questions

4.5 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You were kind enough earlier to call me on the first Northern Ireland question on the Order Paper, which I much appreciated. However, if you examine the list of Northern Ireland questions, you will see that the first Northern Ireland Member to appear in the list is myself, at question 25. My question was followed by a couple from other Northern Ireland Members. If that happened during Scottish questions, and if the first question from a Scottish Member on the Order Paper was No. 25, with the first 24 being from Members from other parts of the United Kingdom, I am sure that there would be uproar.

Is it possible for someone to take a serious look at what is happening? There is evidence of an attempt by Labour Members to pack today's Order Paper with questions. We suspect that Ministers have tried to pack the Order Paper to keep out Northern Ireland Members' questions. Can something be done about it?

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman and the rest of the House know, questions are placed on the Order Paper according to the ballot system. The hon. Gentleman is perfectly free to see that ballot system, as is every other hon. Member. If he wishes to put the matter to the Select Committee on Procedure, he may do so. It is only right, however, to remind the hon. Gentleman that, despite the fact that the first question from a Northern Ireland Member was No. 25, all the members of his party who were in the House today were called to ask supplementary questions, as were the other Northern Ireland Members present in the Chamber. We must now move on.

Orders of the Day

European Communities (Amendment) Bill

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified].

[Relevant document: Second Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Session 1992-93 on Europe after Maastricht (House of Commons Paper No. 642).]

Madam Speaker: I remind hon. Members that between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock I shall have to limit speeches to 10 minutes. I hope that all hon. Members, including Privy Councillors, who speak outside that period will limit their speeches so that as many Members as possible may be called.

4.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A reasoned amendment has been tabled to the Third Reading and you did not say whether you had selected it. It is a useful amendment, which many people would support if there was an opportunity to vote on it.

Madam Speaker: I am well aware of the amendment and read it carefully a couple of times this morning. I thought that it said exactly what the hon. Member wanted to say and that perhaps he did not want to be called in the debate as he had expressed himself so well. I must tell the hon. Member that I have not been able to select his amendment.

Mr. Hurd: The House last debated the Bill as a whole almost a year ago on Second Reading and gave it a majority of 244. Since then the House has spent 204 hours of debate on the Bill. More than 600 amendments were tabled and the Committee stage took 163 hours during 23 days of detailed debate. So it would be fair to begin by congratulating those hon. Members who were most closely involved on all sides of the argument. Perhaps the House will allow me to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), for his diligence and—most of the time—for his good humour. I cannot tell, Madam Speaker, but I think that there is a sense of relief in some parts of the House that the ordeal is almost over and that, as the poet observed,

"even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea".

I do not think that the House should be defensive about what has been a remarkable, although complicated, parliamentary endeavour. The Bill has grown from its original three clauses to eight, but without altering its central thrust. Its purpose remains to bring into United Kingdom law, where necessary, those parts of the treaty of Maastricht which give rise to Community rights and obligations.

I will mention again those amendments which deal with the social protocol and, in his reply, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will touch on those that deal with the economic and monetary aspects of the treaty.

The House has prepared itself more thoroughly than any other Parliament of the Community for the crucial vote tonight. Tonight we shall decide whether to approve the Bill and, through it, the treaty that the Government signed at Maastricht. That decision is with Parliament, not with the Government. The Government will not ratify the treaty unless Parliament passes the necessary legislation.

I know that there is a public perception problem. Most of the press—I shall not embroider the point, for it is a general one—have given up reporting debates in the House, although plenty of space is provided for interpretation, gossip and the odd colourful phrase. With the exception of radio, the media have chosen barely to exercise the right for which their predecessors had to fight very hard in the 18th and early 19th century—the right to report what is said and done in the House.

That is a pity. It is a pity on this occasion, too, because the quality of debate on the Bill has been generally high. Anyone, for example, who is interested, as many people are, in establishing what subsidiarity means, or how, for example, the new arrangements under the treaty for co-operation on foreign and security policy will work out, would be hard put to it to find better discussion of those issues anywhere than the one which now appears in the pages of *Hansard*, on both sides of the argument.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Has it occurred to the Secretary of State that the radio and press have not reported these discussions because the public have had no role whatever to play in them? Anybody who has been to Denmark knows that the media there covered the debate extensively. The Maastricht treaty was made available, but in Britain, as the Government chose to keep the public out, there was perhaps no reason why the radio should explain what was going on.

Mr. Hurd: We have chosen to operate—and the House of Commons endorsed this in its vote on the referendum—as a parliamentary democracy. The right hon. Gentleman has frequently and ably set out his views in theory in public, in theory within earshot of his constituents, but in practice not, for the reason that I have given. Those who struggled in the late 18th and early 19th century for the right to report the proceedings of this House would feel, I think, that that is a pity.

In addition, we have had an excellent report on Europe from the Foreign Affairs Select Committee which analyses the implications of the treaty. The House is obliged to the Select Committee for the work that it has done—not just this time, but on earlier occasions. It has also begun to look ahead, as we all should, to the agenda for 1996.

After this detailed scrutiny and preparation, the House stands ready to take its decision on the Bill and the treaty as a whole. The Danish people, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said, voted decisively in a second referendum on Tuesday in favour of ratifying the treaty, as clarified and amplified by the agreement at Edinburgh. Despite some extraordinary forays from Britain by editors and other distinguished persons, designed to scare the pants off the Danes, the Danes refused to be scared in that way.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Is it the position now that if the Danes had said no, the Government and the other countries of Europe would have ganged up against them, as my right hon. Friend so effectively threatened the Danish people?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is doing again what he has done throughout these proceedings—for example, on the European Court of Justice. He is putting words into people's mouths which were never uttered. I would refer my hon. Friend to what I actually said and to what the Prime Minister said subsequently. If the Danes had voted no, I should have spent most of yesterday in Rome with the Danish Minister and the other Ministers of the Community deciding and setting on track, I hope with the Danes, how the 12 members of the Community should react to that event. Fortunately, however, that was not so.

Nine of the other member states of the Community have used an exclusively parliamentary route to ratification, as we have. That is not because both they and we are, in some way, less democratic, but because that is the normal constitutional procedure for the approval of treaties in this country and in those other member states. The House considered the option of a referendum and decisively rejected it.

I shall not go over the argument again. Like others, it was a thorough and principled debate. We decided to do the job for which we were elected rather than to pass that job back to those who sent us here.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. Friend is making an important point. Is he aware of a German poll, which was reported in *The Guardian* today, which showed that 83 per cent. of the German people wish to have a referendum on the proposed treaty on European union? How can it be said to be inimical to parliamentary democracy for this Parliament, or any other democratic Parliament, to set the question for a referendum and then to judge how the question is decided by the outcome of that referendum as expressed by the people? How is that against parliamentary principles?

Mr. Hurd: We argued that point at length in the House. I cannot remember whether my hon. Friend took part in the debate, but his argument was strongly put. The House came to the conclusion—I am sure rightly—that many people work very hard to elect Members precisely so that we should take decisions of this kind. Therefore, the House was right to follow exactly the line that was taken by my noble Friend Lady Thatcher, when we in the Conservative party voted exactly on those grounds of principle against having a referendum on Europe in 1975.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Secretary of State has said at least twice in the past few minutes that we do things differently from Common Market countries that have had referendums because we are a parliamentary democracy, in which we debate Bills differently. That has been the solid argument of the Government for refusing a referendum. Why is it that when a majority of hon. Members in this so-called parliamentary democracy decide to accept the social chapter, the Foreign Secretary says from the Dispatch Box, "I don't care how many people vote for it, we are going to ignore it"? In this tin-pot parliamentary democracy, the British people cannot have a referendum and if something is passed that the Government do not like they say, "Get stuffed."

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the House of Commons has never voted on such a proposition. The only time that it came close——

Mr. Skinner: It was accepted.

Mr. Hurd: We have never accepted a proposal that would include the social chapter in the treaty or impose burdens on this country. I will come to that. The only time that the House voted on the substance of the matter, it rejected the social chapter on the reasoned amendment that was proposed by the Labour party.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hurd: I want to get on, but if my hon. Friend interrupts me later I shall give way.

I want to look at the background of the wider scene of the discussion and the decision. The negotiations leading up to the treaty were launched at a time of tremendous change in Europe. They followed the liberation of central and eastern Europe and the peaceful reunification of Germany and during the negotiations the Soviet empire collapsed. It is no secret that we would have preferred to have waited for such events to settle and for the completion of the single market before setting out on the negotiations. The treaty that resulted is a genuine attempt to strengthen the framework for European co-operation in such a way as to reflect the importance of the Community in this new Europe.

We need to become more effective in promoting our shared interests in the world. We need to co-operate more effectively against crime and illegal immigration. We need to tackle shared environmental problems. We need to make the single market work effectively. Above all, we need, as Europeans, to tackle the main political and economic burden that is needed to buttress reform and democracy in the eastern part of the continent. The decision that we take tonight will obviously be important for us and for Europe.

I do not think that the treaty is constitutionally more radical or innovative than the Single European Act, which the House approved in 1986. It is not the blueprint for a European super-state. Of course, there are some significant figures who continue to believe that the Community should develop into a united states of Europe. Commissioner Bangemann, for example, is always anxious to share his thoughts with us and they are constantly picked up, especially by Conservative Members. There are others who share his views.

It does not require a shock-horror lead story on the front page of *The Sunday Telegraph* to reveal that the Belgian Prime Minister is a federalist. During the Maastricht negotiations the Dutch Government set out, in good faith, a centralised model for the treaty, with a single Executive and most co-operation made subject to the authority of the European Court of Justice. That model was unacceptable to us and was rejected by most of our partners. Instead, we agreed to proceed on the basis of the "pillar" structure, including intergovernmental co-operation, which is contained in the treaty and which the House has discussed for many hours.

The treaty is not the final word in the development of the Community. There will continue to be differing views in all member states, which is perfectly healthy. We must continue to argue our case strongly. But the treaty, in contrast to its predecessors, marks an advance for our approach. Others will continue to hold views that I regard as old-fashioned—for example, that the only respectable way forward for Europe is that of steady integration and centralisation. We believe differently and the public across

[Mr. Hurd]

Europe increasingly express a different opinion, as does the treaty. The debate will continue; we should not be dismayed by it.

If we consider the hours of discussion in the House, we see that the Bill has been assailed by two main groups of critics.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that those who want a federal set-up—be they abroad or the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath)—see the treaty as the basis for creating, in a short period, a centralised, federal state of Europe modelled very much on the United States of Europe? The third stage of the treaty contains powers that provide the basis for that vision. Why is not the Foreign Secretary as honest with the House as the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup?

Mr. Hurd: We are both entirely honest in putting forward differing views on the future of Europe. Those who think in the way described by the hon. Gentleman will continue to argue their case as they are entitled to do—I have mentioned some of them by name. We shall continue to argue our case. I hope that I am making it clear that the sort of Europe for which we are arguing is theone that will exist and that will be based on the treaty that we are asking the House to enable us to ratify. The evidence to support my assertion is constantly piling up.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West) *rose*——

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I promised to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Sir Teddy Taylor: Before the Foreign Secretary leaves the issue of the protocol and his great respect for parliamentary sovereignty, will he state whether there has ever been a time in the history of Parliament when the House of Commons has acted as it has over the protocol? It voted to show that it did not want taxpayers' money to be used for a particular purpose—to pay for the social chapter of the other 11 members—but, despite that clear vote on the protocol, the Government have said that they will use taxpayers' money for that purpose.

Mr. Hurd: We will use taxpayers' money in the legal ways for which provision is made. My hon. Friend makes a specific point about administrative expenses. I have discussed the matter with him on the Floor of the House and in correspondence on several occasions. He certainly knows how we intend to proceed if any administrative expenses are incurred as a result of the social protocol. Clearly, we must act in line with the provisions approved by the House under different Acts.

Mr. Randall *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman as I must make some progress.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Government just ignore Parliament.

Mr. Hurd: No. I have not ignored my hon. Friend, although he seemed to think that I was going to do so earlier.

In the House, the Bill has been assailed by two groups of critics whose avowed objectives were incompatible, but who were prepared to make common cause from time to time to seek to damage the Government or the treaty. The Labour party has shown itself to be obsessed by just one aspect of the treaty, the social chapter. It knows that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister could not have fulfilled the mandate given to him by the House had he signed the social chapter. It knows that almost every member state has now ratified the treaty containing the social protocol which excludes the United Kingdom from the effect of the agreement of the Eleven.

It knows that at the last election it put forward such corporatist policies, but was not elected. If it wants to pursue such policies it would be better for it to seek a mandate through the front door rather than try to smuggle in such policies through the back door. Our view remains unchanged. We believe that Britain and the Community as a whole will be better off without the damaging provisions of the social chapter. I shall briefly set out our case yet again.

At present, in social affairs and employment law, the treaty of Rome gives the Community specific power to legislate by qualified majority vote on minimum standards of health and safety for workers. If other action is suggested in the social sphere, it has to be on the basis of unanimity. The social agreement of the Eleven would extend the use of qualified majority voting to new areas, including working conditions, informing and consulting workers, and the equal treatment of men and women. If it had been adopted for the Community as a whole, it would have provided more scope for Community action to centralise policies in which, because of the strongly differing experiences and traditions of member states, we believe that the principle of subsidiarity should apply. I have been asked several times to specify.

We believe that a range of unwelcome legislation could be imposed on the British Parliament, including a compulsory model for worker consultation in British firms, a rigid framework for rules and conditions of employment, costly new restrictions on part-time workers, and the notion that, in sex discrimination cases, employers should in effect be considered guilty rather than innocent.

Furthermore, the trade unions are clearly watching the provisions of the social charter, which would allow Europe-wide deals between unions and employers' groups, which may or may not be representative, and for those deals to be transformed into Community law without United Kingdom Government or parliamentary involvement. In short, we believe and argue that the provisions could place in jeopardy many of the achievements of the past 14 years in freeing our labour market from restrictions that destroy jobs.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Will the Secretary of State explain why he believes that the social chapter would be so much more damaging to this country than other member states believe it would be to their economies? Will he join me in condemning the advertisements that have recently appeared in the German press, extolling the virtues of our low wages and low national insurance contributions and encouraging German firms to invest in this country on that basis? Why

is he equating us with third-world economies? Why will not he adopt the social chapter and allow our workers to have the same rights as others so that they can compete equally with other EC member states?

Mr. Hurd: We do not want our economy to suffer from the high costs that are causing such harm to the German economy at the moment. *[Interruption.]* Members of Labour's Front Bench are hopelessly out of date. If they were following the debate on the continent, they would know that the Commission, the Germans, the new French Government and many other people are concerned about European competitiveness and the high labour costs—wages plus other costs—which European employers are having to shoulder in comparison to those in the United States, Japan and Asian countries.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): If that is true—if Britain offers less protection to people at work, lower standards of safety and health at work and lower wages—why have other economies done so much better than ours?

Mr. Hurd: I would say, "Watch that space." That is not what is happening at the moment. The right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* We are emerging from recession more quickly than most commentators, and certainly the Opposition, expected. Part of the reason may be the fact that our labour market is organised not to put such extra burdens on employers.

In answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), who said that we were isolated, I quote from a statement made on 3 May by Mr. Carlos Ferrer, the president of UNICE—the Union of Industrial and Employers Confederations of Furope—to Employment and Social Affairs Ministers. He set out a long series of criticisms and demands, which are summed up in the phrase that he used to the assembled Community Ministers:

"Please stop taking measures which unnecessarily destroy jobs."

He is not an Englishman, but the head of the European employers' organisation, and he makes our point exactly.

Dr. Cunningham: But, in all of that, the head of the European Employers Federation never once asked the other 11 to withdraw from the social chapter.

Mr. Hurd: The European employers have been a little slow to realise what is afoot. I strongly advise right hon. and hon. Members to read what was said. The critique here—rather belatedly put forward, I agree, but very cogently argued—is exactly what Conservative Members have constantly urged and supplies the reason why we did not join the social chapter. We are adhering to that position and will continue to do so.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): My right hon. Friend will be aware, as is the rest of the House, that we had encouraging news today about unemployment, which has now fallen for three months in succession. We are the only country in Europe in which unemployment is falling, much earlier in the economic cycle than expected. One reason for that, cited by many economists, is the flexibility that employers in this country have to hire people because they are not burdened with excessive social regulations.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend reinforces the point that I am trying to make. The debate is only now really catching fire on the continent of Europe. The Opposition have not yet tuned into it, but they will have to do so fairly soon.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Foreign Secretary give way?

Mr. Hurd: No. I must get on, as I promised, to amendment No. 2.

Amendment No. 2 featured as amendment No. 27 in a previous life. I made the Government's position clear in the debate on 5 May. The effect of the amendment has been to add the social protocol to those parts of the Maastricht treaty—such as the intergovernmental pillars—that are not being incorporated into United Kingdom law because they do not need to be.

I come now to the point of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). The amendment does not—and its movers did not claim that it did—force the United Kingdom to accept the social chapter, although that was the excuse given for the efforts to delay ratification; nor does it delete the social protocol from the treaty. I will not repeat the arguments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General, but we are confident of our legal ground, which has been explained to the House on a number of occasions.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

Before I come to the critics on the Conservative Benches, I will deal with the general stance of the Labour party. It has, of course, altered constantly over the years. The Labour party has adopted as many positions as possible. In the early 1960s it opposed our membership of the Community; in the late 1960s it was in favour; in 1972 it was against; by 1974 it was in favour of someone else's taking the decision; by 1975 it was recommending a yes vote in the referendum; in 1981 it was back to opposing the Community as a capitalist plot—some hon. Members still believe that. I think that we are now in the parliamentary lifetime of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). In 1987 the Labour party was back in the pro-membership fold. In 1992, it claimed to support the Maastricht treaty—but it is a funny kind of support that we have had in the proceedings in the House. So the weathercock of the Labour party has turned and turned again.

Now the Labour party has reached a decision on how it will vote tonight. I do not know, of course; I only know what I have read, and I may be wrong—I hope that I am. The whole House is waiting for the decision of the Opposition Front Bench. Against this background of the weathercock, will Labour Members vote yes or will they vote no? What will be the intellectual climax of all these years, these decades of reflection and debate in the Labour party? It will not disappoint us; it has now come up with something new. Tired of yes, tired of no, Labour Members will abstain.

Some of us remember Mr. Frank Maguire, who, in 1979, for a fairly crucial vote, braved the perils of the Irish sea and came from Fermanagh and South Tyrone to abstain in person. There they are, the talent, the courage,

[Mr. Hurd]

the massed firepower—the relatively massed firepower; all of 35 Labour Members are present—who have come here from all parts of the kingdom to abstain in person.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I hope that after all that discussion and debate, one or two Labour Members might find it in their minds to express an opinion of some kind in the Lobby tonight.

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has been patient and persistent. I give way to him.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the Foreign Secretary for giving way. I assure him that at least 60 Labour Members voted against the Bill on Second Reading and I am sure that they will vote against the Maastricht treaty again tonight, primarily because it takes away from national Parliaments the power to set economic policy and hands it over to an unelected set of bankers who will impose the economic policies of price stability, deflation and high unemployment throughout the European Community.

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman has made the transition in my speech easy. He believes that the Community is a bankers' ramp and a capitalist plot. Now I shall speak to those of my hon. Friends who are persuaded from time to time that the Community is a socialist conspiracy, or possibly even, as I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has said, a communist plot. Let me move from one group of critics to another.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose*——

Mr. Nicholas Budgen *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: No, I want to get on. I have given way to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) many times over the years and I have already given way to him once this afternoon.

The second group of critics are my right hon. and hon. Friends, so I should like to deal fairly and gently with the deep and genuine concerns felt by some of them. Their concerns are mainly about the existing Community, but they also fear that the treaty of Maastricht will make it worse. I believe that their fears of a lurch into a super-state are misguided. We share their concerns about aspects of Community life and ways in which the Community functions under the existing treaties. However, none of that would be cured by rejecting Maastricht—indeed, the opposite would happen. We believe Maastricht to be an improvement on the previous position. It is not a perfect treaty, but, as negotiated for this country, it will suit us well. As the continental commentators noticed at the time, it was largely settled on our terms.

Why do I say that? Because, as a result of the treaty, there will be a strengthened basis for co-operation in foreign policy and in fighting cross-frontier crime and illegal immigration. The two big new areas of work under the Maastricht treaty—foreign policy and the Home Office subjects of law and order—will be managed between national Governments accountable to national Parliaments. The Commission will not enjoy a monopoly of initiative and the processes will not fall under the jurisdiction of the European Court.

In many parts of the world it makes sense for us to work together in foreign policy, because that way we are more likely to get results than if each of us goes our own way. For example, we cannot solve the different Yugoslav crises from outside and we all therefore feel frustrated and angry. However, although it has been imperfect, what good news there has been has been achieved through the process of European co-operation on foreign policy: creating a peace process and supporting the efforts of Lord Owen and Mr. Vance; imposing sanctions; providing the peacekeeping monitors and the humanitarian aid, and the European troops to escort it; and helping to contain the conflict.

That is not enough, which is why we have all continued to be frustrated and angry, but one thing is certain: the situation would have been much worse if the old states of Europe had divided, as they have done before, between client states in the Balkans. History has shown where that disintegration of European policy can lead.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree how striking and noteworthy it is that the three western European applicant countries, and perhaps Norway, too, have unanimously said that their keenness to join is enhanced and augmented by the Maastricht treaty? The treaty has increased their enthusiasm.

Mr. Hurd: Yes, that is the treaty which those countries are applying to join and I do not think that negotiations for enlargement would continue with those four countries if it were not ratified.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hurd: May I get on a little?

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: Is it on this point?

Mr. Marlow: Yes.

Mr. Hurd: I give way to my hon. Friend, but after that I do not intend to give way again.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The Maastricht teaty is taking us towards a halfway house on the road to a European institution that would control defence and foreign policy. Will my right hon. Friend say that the Government will not agree at a later stage to defence and foreign policy coming within the ambit of European institutions?

Mr. Hurd: They do not. They exist as one of the pillars for co-operation. I am glad that after all the weeks of debate, my hon. Friend concedes that, because it has been much disputed by some of those who have worked with him.

I cannot say what will happen in 1996. I argued strongly and successfully against majority voting on foreign policy. I do not wish to commit this Government to what will happen in 1996 or thereafter. I simply speak of what is in the treaty today, where this whole area is firmly in the sphere of co-operation between Governments. Our special interests and responsibilities in this field are safeguarded —basic decisions on common foreign policy and security matters are by unanimity, the treaty takes account of our

distinct position as a permanent member of the Security Council and the position of NATO is preserved as the key to Europe's defence.

One of the most important innovations in the treaty is the principle of subsidiarity. The matter has been much debated in the House and it lies at the heart of our view of how the Community should develop. It stems from an Anglo-German proposal. We put that case and argued it through and there it is in the treaty.

As enshrined in article 3b of the treaty, it means that three questions must be answered before Community legislation is put forward. Can the Community act, which is the question of competence, and it can act only when the treaties allow it to act; should the Community act; and how much should the Community do? That offers us the chance to arrest the centralising, harmonising tendency of which I have spoken. Under the treaty of Maastricht, that will become a legally binding provision of the treaty of Rome. Before that, and anticipating that, we have worked, as the House knows, to create it as a political fact.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is my right hon. Friend aware that since the date of the paving debate—I have just been to the Library to check—265 regulations and directives are to come before the House from the EC? Shall we be doing a favour in our quest for reduced bureaucracy and red tape to vote for or against those regulations and directives?

Mr. Hurd: Some of them are required to put the single market into effect, while others are required for shared environmental purposes. The volume, the total, has substantially reduced because the Commission has been cutting its legislative proposals in response to subsidiarity, even before ratification of the Maastricht treaty. There are still some which we strongly object to and resist and we have our own proposals for scrapping existing legislation. That process—what I described as the political fact—is in being, even before the treaty is ratified, and we certainly want to carry it further.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: No. I have given way generously and Madam Speaker spoke of the long list of hon. Members wishing to take part in the debate; she even referred to the hon. Gentleman in that context.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Member knows that if the Foreign Secretary does not give way, he must resume his seat.

Mr. Hurd: Thus the structure of the treaty, the concept of the pillars of inter-governmental co-operation and the concept of subsidiarity lie in prudence. There are others which I will not detail. We regard the tightening up of the definition of a number of areas of competence—the exclusion of harmonisation, the provision for the better enforcement of Community law, the increased accountability of the Commission and the confirmation of the role of the European Council—as steps forward.

We are clear that there would be lasting damage to British interests if, with ratification completed or in sight in 11 member states we were now to destroy the treaty. British reservations would not dissolve the desire of our partners to pursue the agenda at Maastricht. They would certainly seek to move ahead in some areas without us, while our influence on other fronts—for example, the GATT talks, enlargement and the single market—would be put on to the margins. We would still be in the Community and in the single market, but our ability to promote and defend British interests would be diminished.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: I give way to my hon. Friend, but it must for the last time, as I must make progress with my speech.

Mr. Shepherd: In all the debates to which my right hon. Friend referred—the 160 hours or more—we never returned to the first principle of democratic and accountable government. The profound rejection expressed by many people across Europe is based on their belief that it is not a democratic treaty. It contradicts government by and for the people, and so on. That is the fundamental objection. During all the hours of debate, the occupants of both Front Benches scrupulously moved aside from, and did not discuss, the issue of democratic and accountable government. This House is built on that. Why are the Government weighing more highly than democratic government the institutional arrangements that are profoundly anti-democratic?

Mr. Hurd: It is not anti-democratic to have a structure which puts emphasis in the new spheres of work on national Ministers co-operating together and being responsible, as I am, to national parliaments. There is nothing undemocratic about that.

There is nothing undemocratic in assessing and increasing the role of the European Parliament in monitoring the work of the Commission. So we have a Community which has both characteristics: the Community and Community institutions and the work between Governments. Both must be accountable, I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is what is in the treaty and that is what we have endlessly discussed. My hon. Friend is shutting his eyes to what is in the treaty because he wishes to haunt himself with what is not in the treaty.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who is the most eloquent of all the critics on this score, that we are not sufficiently confident in the way in which we look at the Community. In recent years, British ideas have been decisive in the construction of the single market, the development of co-operation on foreign policy and against terrorism through Trevi, in reforming the CAP, in limiting Community spending, in designing association agreements with the countries of central and eastern Europe, in championing subsidiarity and in securing agreement to enlargement.

That has been formidable progress, yet too many people, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills and others, still believe of the Community to be in some way a conspiracy by wily and over-clever foreigners to outwit us. That is not how the rest of Europe sees it. As it happens, and without any leading from me, one European Foreign Minister told me this week that, having thought about it, he thought that 40 per cent. of the intellectual content of the Community today owed its origin to my noble Friend Lady Thatcher—*[Interruption.]* I know that, for more than one reason, these are perilous waters, but I am simply reporting what an intelligent observer, reflecting on subsidiarity, on the single market and on the British rebate, had to say.

[Mr. Hurd]

In the next few years, the Community has a huge programme of work. I am thinking of GATT, enlargement and help in reforming the east of our continent. Beyond that, in 1996, there will be a further intergovernmental conference to review the treaties. The Maastricht treaty does not prejudge that review. We intend that at that conference British ideas should enrich the agenda.

Looking to the future beyond the Maastricht treaty, we need to build a more decentralised and diverse Community, outward-looking and free-trading. We need to look again at the Community institutions—for example, to make the Commission more accountable. We need to build up further the role of national parliaments. That is acknowledged in the Maastricht treaty, but it needs to be built up further. We need to end the assumption that, outside the established areas of the core policy, all member states must automatically do everything together at the same speed. We want a debate and to achieve a consensus in this country and beyond it on that type of agenda.

The House will look at its decision tonight in the perspective of 50 years. That is the age of the Community —it is not quite 50 years old—which is very short by any European measure. It was natural that, in its early days, the founders set themselves to struggle against the past and to assert the future of the Community in contrast to the all-powerful nation states which had brought Europe to disaster twice this century.

It was natural that at the beginning the founders should treasure as an advance every move towards integration and every increase in the competence of the Community, as if by each such move of integration Europe was climbing rung by rung out of a pit. But now, and particularly during the past three or four years, we can see the limits of such an approach. The diversity and variety of Europe are no longer seen as anachronisms and we are no longer heading towards a union in which such diversity will be smothered or swept away.

I quote from a recent speech of Chancellor Kohl which illustrates how his thinking has changed:

"It is clear to me that we all need the political union of Europe but that does not mean that I shall cease to be German, John Major will cease to be British or Francois Mitterrand will cease to be French. We shall remain what we are. Our identity will remain. We are not building the United States of Europe. The statement which Churchill made here in Zurich appeals to me a lot, but unfortunately it is misleading. I have to admit that I have used it for far too long. The United States of Europe would mean that we would be like Texas or California. That is not the case. We shall remain in this Europe to a large extent nation states with our own identity and separate administrations in many areas. What we need now is a firm European roof over the old structures."

I would not use those exact words, but they are very interesting. They show how the thinking of even as fervent a European as Chancellor Kohl has changed. The European union set out in the treaty will not be a unitary state. Nor will it be a federation on the lines of the United States, Canada, Australia or Germany.

I have sketched—and we shall go on setting out—how we think the Community should evolve. The longer I am involved in Community meetings, the more clearly I see that what counts in the end is not the architecture or the machinery or the rulebook, but the will. I will give two examples of that in closing. We have a single European stance in the GATT negotiations, based on the absolute competence of the treaty of Rome. The Commission negotiates on behalf of us all. That is not easy and every now and then the boat is rocked, but it is essential. No one would benefit, certainly not the business men in this country or those with whom we negotiate in the rest of the world, if the common European negotiating position in those negotiations disintegrated.

The second example—central and eastern Europe—is different. There are huge tasks ahead and we have only just begun to grasp the difficulties. There is a huge task ahead for us Europeans, not just in economic terms, but through closer political links and in the field of security in central and eastern Europe. We have to act together on those things if we are to act successfully. The treaty of Rome provides no competence in this matter. The Commission has no monopoly. The treaty of Maastricht shows how this can be done by co-operation. It has to be done and this is not a matter that we can shirk or leave aside.

These are two completely different European tasks and they are essentially European tasks to be achieved through quite different pieces of machinery. It is the will to agree and work together which in both instances will be decisive. Let us reduce and criticise the detail, the regulation and the small-minded acts of interference, but let us do that not in a negative way but to find again the decisive will to act together successfully in the great matters where there is a European interest and where there must be a European effort. Because the Bill enables us to play our full part in reasserting that will power, I commend it to the House.

4.53 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I join the Foreign Secretary in paying a compliment to the House for the generally good-natured way in which a very long and arduous series of debates has been conducted.

We all saw that the right hon. Gentleman could barely suppress a sigh of relief as he sat down at the conclusion of his speech. It is true that, as well as some serious debates, there have also been some lighter moments. We have just observed a couple during the right hon. Gentleman's speech. We can always tell when he is in trouble, because his normal silky-smooth appearance changes. He goes slightly red. The decibel knob is turned up. Words come louder and louder, but meaning goes further and further away. That is exactly what happened when he tried to defend the Government's untenable position on the social chapter this afternoon.

The right hon. Gentleman was full of bluff and bluster about how the Labour party will or will not vote tonight. That is a bit rich coming from the right hon. Gentleman, who sidled away from so many votes on amendments in the last few weeks that we have lost count. He has twisted and turned, and given more explanations than the Vicar of Bray for why he was accepting this or that amendment on the social chapter, or for why he did not want a vote on the record and risk a defeat for the Government in the House.

I do not know why on earth the Foreign Secretary began his speech by launching into an attack on the press. It has been difficult for the press, let alone members of public reading the newspapers, to understand some of the Byzantine manoeuverings of the Government. Hon. Members have even faced difficulties in obtaining votes on some of the most important aspects of the legislation. I am not surprised that that made neither graphic reading nor instant headlines for the popular press.

The right hon. Gentleman's attacks on European employers were a bit rich also. I shall remind him of what a European Conservative conference had to say about the position that he was trying so ineffectively to defend. The meeting was the conference of the European people's parties heads of government and party leaders, so I assume that either the Foreign Secretary or his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was present. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps they were too embarrassed to attend and in view of the content of the resolution, I am not surprised. The organisation said that it

"Deplores the fact that the British Prime Minister and leader of British Conservative party took a negative position in Maastricht concerning European political union, particularly with regard to a common social policy."

Even the Government's Conservative allies and colleagues in the EC not only disagree with but deplore the very action that the right hon. Gentleman was seeking to justify.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: Not at the moment. I shall return to that point.

There have been lighter moments on other occasions also. There was the performance of the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), the Minister of State at the Foreign Office. He huffed and puffed like Tristan the Tank Engine about amendment No. 27. "Ratification, ratification! Oh dear, it will not be possible!" Stern warnings were issued to the boys and girls playing with the signals. The Maastricht express would be derailed, he warned. This little game kept him amused for months on end. It was a simple pleasure, until "Whoosh! Up pops the Oxford flyer, Douglas the Diesel." Streamlined, slick and polished, up he streaked—at least that is what *The Guardian* said—because he had lost his trousers. "Oh dear! A terrible shunt." "Watch the signals," bleated Tristan. "Tiresome and undesirable," said Douglas. "Let's ignore them for the sake of completeness and clairty."

It was not the treaty or the legislation that was derailed: it was the Watford warbler. The advice that he had given and the protests that he had made were wiped out at a stroke without the apology by his right hon. Friend, who is sitting next to him today.

There has been a lot of amusement, and there have been a lot of attempts by both the Foreign Secretary and the Minister to mislead the House. I shall come to a few examples in a moment or two.

The Foreign Secretary and I nevertheless agree that the treaty represents an important series of developments for the EC. It creates new opportunities for European co-operation. The agreement on the pillars of the treaty ensures the opportunity for developing co-operation outside the Community institutions—a welcome innovation.

The progress on European policy development and European co-operation can thus take place within the Community institutions—the Commission, the Council and the Parliament—or outside them. Co-operation on common foreign and security policies and the common urgency to fight crime more effectively are issues of considerable importance which will be dealt with under the pillars of the treaty.

Labour has already made it clear on many occasions that it broadly supports the treaty concluded at Maastricht. We believe it is a necessary framework for the economic, social and political development of the European Community.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): So why does the right hon. Gentleman not vote for it?

Dr. Cunningham: If the hon. Lady had been listening she would have heard that I was referring to the treaty. We are debating and voting on the Bill, which is an entirely different issue.

We believe that the treaty is a necessary framework for the economic, social and political development of the Community. A significant number of specific aspects are welcome: regional policy, the cohesion fund, majority voting on environment policy issues, public health and training for young people. The principle of subsidiarity is welcome, too, although controversy surrounds the Government's attitude towards it.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I said that I would give way and I will do so in a moment or two.

New powers for the European Parliament are also welcome, indeed overdue, and deserve support as a necessary first step towards greater openness or transparency and more effective democratic control of the Commission and other Community institutions.

Last year at our annual conference, Labour put forward our view on how the Community should develop —our agenda for change. I reiterate our belief that Britain's future is intimately involved with Europe and reaffirm our commitment to closer economic and political co-operation.

In 1992, the annual conference of the Labour party decided that

"The Maastricht treaty, while not perfect is the best arrangement that can currently be achieved".

Mr. Cormack: If the treaty has these attributes, why has the right hon. Gentleman done everything he can to delay ratification? Why has he himself earned the criticism of his social democratic friends in Europe for the extraordinary attitude that the British Labour party has taken throughout the past year?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. First, I have never, and nor have my hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench, participated in any filibustering or procrastination on the Bill. On occasions, we have actually moved and voted for closures. If we had wanted to prevent the ratification of the treaty, there were endless opportunities on which we could have voted for amendments to prevent them. The hon. Gentleman's first point is completely wrong.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I defy him to produce evidence that any of my socialist or social democratic colleagues in the Party of European Socialists, of which I am vice-president, have articulated the view he ascribed to them today. I reject it and they will reject it too.

Mr. Budgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: Not for the moment. I shall give way in due course.

Yesterday the Labour party national executive committee agreed a new policy document entitled

[Dr. Cunningham]

"Prosperity through co-operation: a new European future". That document looks at the post-Maastricht realities in social, political and economic terms.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Was Dennis Skinner there?

Dr. Cunningham: That shows how much the hon. Gentleman knows. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is no longer a member of the committee.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Can my right hon. Friend enlighten us all and, indeed, the public about the extent to which any draft of such a policy was circulated to all members of the party of which he and I have the honour to be members and which claims to be a democratic party?

Dr. Cunningham: The document was produced by a working party. It was submitted to the joint policy committee of our party. It went from there to the new policy forum of the party and to the national executive committee and it will go to the party annual conference in the autumn. Any suggestion——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the right hon. Gentleman continues, may I remind him that this is the Third Reading of the Bill. I hope we shall not go too far from that in this interesting matter.

Dr. Cunningham: I understand what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I am trying to respond to an earlier intervention. I can hardly take another one while I am dealing with this one. I understand what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was responding to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

Of course, the document recognises the shortcomings of the treaty. It sees Maastricht not as an end but as part of a developing Europe—something to improve and build on. We must look beyond the treaty to the Europe that we want to help fashion, but we do not share the Government's view of Europe. There are and remain fundamental differences between us.

We have from the outset drawn a clear distinction between support for a developing European Community and our opposition to the Maastricht Bill which has been before the House for so many months. We could not support the Bill on Second Reading and we cannot support it tonight.

The Government's decision to exclude Britain and the British people from the advantages of the social chapter is fundamentally unacceptable to us. We have consistently argued that the Government are wrong on this vital social policy aspect of the treaty. They are wrong because it will result in lower status and fewer rights for British people compared with their European neighbours, because it envisages Britain as a low-wage, low-skill sweatshop economy and because it sets Britain apart from, and against, the other members of the Community. As I have said, those views have been widely endorsed by political parties, employers and leaders of Conservative parties across the Community.

As the Foreign Secretary referred to the Federal Republic of Germany, let me remind him that when my hon. Friend for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and I met German Ministers in Bonn and spokespersons for the German employers federation I asked them, "Did it ever occur to you to ask your Government to opt out of the social chapter?" "Not for a moment," they said.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving the House a full account of the meeting. Could he also give us a full account of the meeting between his right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and President Mitterrand who publicly expressed his concern about why the Labour party was not supporting the treaty?

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I am not sure how he knows what Francois Mitterrand said to my right hon. and learned Friend. He repeatedly peddles that myth and I am sorry that I showed him the courtesy of giving way to him.

One of the lessons that we in Britain should have learned by now about developments in the Community is that to stand back, to remain apart and to join late inevitably leads to disadvantages for our country. We lose influence and we play no part in shaping events or institutions.

The record shows that Britain eventually signs up, but the Community has moved on. Britain is chasing the game and usually losing as a result. The Government have repeated this basic error again over the social chapter and the Maastricht process in general.

Mr. Budgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way in due course.

The political stance of the Conservative Government has everything to do with Conservative party politics and nothing to do with Britain's best interests or the well-being of the British people. Indeed, it is a betrayal of the British people.

Mr. Budgen: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, many Conservative Members wish to dissociate themselves from the allegation that the Labour party attacked the Bill. It is obvious that, throughout the proceedings, Opposition Front-Bench Members have given the most full-hearted support to the Government. All who support the Maastricht treaty should understand that they have, in a most courageous way, abandoned the traditional role of opposition and have given the Government the most slavish support that has ever been seen.

Dr. Cunningham: That was a wonderful piece of cheek, but there was not a word of truth in it. The truth is that we have tried over many weeks and in many ways to change and amend the Bill. We have had considerable success, as is set out in this schedule, which I am showing the hon. Gentleman. As he is some distance away from me, I have coloured it so that he can see the amendments that have been made to the Bill as a result of the debates and the pressure from those on the Opposition Front Bench. There is a graphic illustration of exactly how wrong the hon. Gentleman is in his assertion.

The Labour party has ensured that the Maastricht treaty has been properly and thoroughly debated, and largely at a sensible time of the day. We have not been involved in time wasting, filibustering or obstructionism. Our objectives were to try to get for Britain the social chapter of the treaty, reverse the opt out, obtain improvements to the Bill, in line with party policy objectives, that would not render the treaty unratifiable, which was never our policy, and ensure that a complex and hugely important treaty was given the proper and detailed scrutiny that it merited.

We have secured a vote on the social chapter, after Royal Assent but before ratification. We gained a valuable legal change, which, it is believed, may yet allow British workers to use the European Court of Justice to benefit from the social chapter. We defeated the Government's attempt to keep the new European Committee of the Regions as yet another home for their business and political friends. We passed amendments on the accountability of the Bank of England, on co-ordination of economic policies and ECOFIN, on requiring comparative assessment of the United Kingdom's economic performance and on convergence and the assessment of Government deficits.

I do not exaggerate the importance of those gains—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, they are a long way in advance of any gains that anyone else has made as a result of this long, drawn-out process. Given that those amendments were won in spite of the Government's twists and manoeuvres and the unpredictable performance of Ministers, and their various amendments, and that the House will now have the clear opportunity to vote on the issue of the social chapter, it would be obtuse of Opposition Members to vote against the Third Reading of the Bill. If we defeated the Bill, the people of Britain and Europe as a whole would be denied the treaty and the social chapter.

I remind the House that every democratic socialist party in the Community, in or out of office, wishes to see the Maastricht treaty ratified. Every democratic socialist party in the applicant countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Austria wishes to see the treaty approved and has agreed to accept it as part of its application to join the Community. The citizens of all those 15 countries will enjoy the whole of the treaty. The result of the Danish referendum on Tuesday, which was warmly welcomed by the Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, was organised and planned by the social democratic Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and his colleagues. A majority yes vote in Denmark would have been inconceivable if the social chapter had been excluded from the treaty for Denmark.

Mr. Marlow: The right hon. Gentleman is referring to the vote in Denmark. I understand that Her Majesty's Opposition are in favour of having a referendum on the trivia of proportional representation. Why are they not in favour of having a referendum on the immensity of European union?

Dr. Cunningham: We debated that at length in the House, but if the hon. Gentleman wants me to summarise the position, I shall do so again. We also debated that at length as a matter of policy at our annual party conference and the proposition that we should support a referendum was overwhelmingly rejected, so our party policy, like that of the Government, was that we should proceed on the parliamentary process of ratification. What is more—I remind the hon. Gentleman for what it is worth, although I do not suppose that he will take much notice—the British people had a referendum, thanks to a Labour Government in 1976, on the issue of membership of the Community. We know what the outcome was.

In Britain alone, the social chapter will not apply.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: No, I am not giving way.

In Britain alone, the social chapter will not apply, and that is why we cannot support the Bill. That is why, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends in the shadow Cabinet, I urge Labour Members to abstain in the vote. *[Interruption.]* The Foreign Secretary would not be smiling if I had urged them to vote against Third Reading.

Some of our critics, among the Liberal Democrats as well as among those on the Conservative Benches, have argued that our position on the social chapter is a tactic, a device and that our decision to recommend abstention is aimed at exposing the deep, even vicious, divisions in the Conservative party. I am flattered to think that there are some who believe that we can bring Bill and Edwina together or that we can bring the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) back into the fold of the Prime Minister. I suspect that he has already had his "Dear John" letter from her. I do not think that there is anything that we can do, or would want to do, to overshadow those divisions.

As *The Guardian* put it rather indelicately, following the Foreign Secretary's speech on 5 May:

> "Over the past six months, Her Majesty's Government has adopted more positions than are set out in the Kama Sutra. No wonder Mr. Hurd looked exhausted when he sat down." The *Financial Times* described his performance as "an ignominious climbdown". We have no reason to apologise to the Government. We have been consistent throughout this long process. All the inconsistencies have come from those sitting on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Kama Sutra is a great deal more interesting than Labour party policy documents. Given his full list of expressions of support for the treaty, would it not be sensible for him to support the Third Reading? He has also claimed credit for what was new clause 74, which concerned the principle of the social protocol, and a vote on that can come only when the Bill has become an Act. He should speed it on its way with his full support.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening. Perhaps I can remind him briefly of what I have said. Were those Government manoeuvres over many months, and was our response to them, merely a tactic? Are maternity benefits, equality for women and ethnic minority communities, maximum working hours regulations, annual holiday entitlements, rights for 3 million unemployed people, health and safety at work, protection of children and adults from employment exploitation and improved social and professional integration for people with disabilities all a tactic, or are they matters of principle and importance, which are being denied to the people of this country by the Government's pig-headed obstinacy on the matter of the social chapter?

I remind the Government of the point made in an intervention by one of my hon. Friends, that they promoted advertisements in Germany to try to persuade

[Dr. Cunningham]

German employers to contact the British consul in Düsseldorf to find out how they could invest in Britain. The advertisements proclaimed that wages were lower in Britain, and that employment protection and social charges were significantly lower than in Germany. Is that the kind of image that the hon. Gentleman thinks should be portrayed abroad? Do the Government want us to endorse a sweatshop economy? There is no way in which we would endorse that kind of approach.

Before anyone says that the problems in the British economy were caused by the trade unions or by working people, I draw attention to the speech by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, whom I am glad to see in this place, as reported in *The Daily Telegraph* editorial yesterday. It stated:

"In a speech this week to the Tory Reform Group, Mr. Dorrell, one of the ablest young Ministers in the Government, widely tipped for Cabinet office, produced a sharp analysis of the 1980s boom, attributing it to the monetary indiscipline of the late Thatcher years. He described it as 'built on sand'".

That is his view of the economy that his right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Prime Minister were responsible for constructing. It was "built on sand", but the Government have the gall to tell us that to give protection to British people employed in the British economy is a threat to our country.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): My right hon. Friend referred to matters of principle and consistency when speaking about the case, as he sees it, against a referendum. In the light of what happened yesterday, we are entitled to an explanation. After all, did not my right hon. Friend vote for a referendum in 1975 following which there was a referendum on accession to the Rome treaty? Did he not and did not my right hon. and learned Friend the leader of the party move a motion for a referendum on Welsh and Scottish devolution in February 1977, outlining the issue as being a matter of great constitutional importance on which the people had not had a chance to express their views?

How can he reconcile the position that he took in the debate in April, in which he not only advocated opposition to a referendum but voted against one, with his obvious acceptance yesterday of the case for a referendum on a matter of far less importance, proportional representation? Where is the consistency, where is the principle and where is the democratic accountability in all that?

Dr. Cunningham: I answered that question when we debate the referendum and I am happy to answer it again. We had a referendum about membership of the Community. My right hon. Friend knows that, and he was a member of the Cabinet at the time. He was on the losing side in that argument. He has never accepted the decision of the British people in that referendum, and there is no evidence to suggest that if there were another one he would accept the decision this time. The decision has been taken.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said that if during the period of a Labour Government there was a desire to test the will of the British people about a change in the system of electing Members of Parliament, the matter should be put to the people to see whether they wanted to change from first past the post to any other system. That would be a new and fundamental proposition, and that is why my right hon. and learned Friend proposed it.

I was speaking about the social chapter. It is to the credit of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) that he has said that it was an error to opt out of the social chapter. Of course the President of the Board of Trade takes the same view. In an article entitled "Time to get off the sidelines", in *The Times* in 1989, he said:

"Our absence can only permit the self-interest of other nations. We paid a heavy price when others designed the CAP. It would be unforgivable to repeat that mistake in industrial and financial policies. The same argument applies to the social charter."

There we have it from the President of the Board of Trade, with all his candour. However, in his Budget statement on 16 March the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"this Government will never sign the social chapter."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 170.]

With which of his Cabinet colleagues does the Foreign Secretary agree? Does he agree with the President of the Board of Trade or with the Chancellor? Will he take this opportunity to endorse one or other of those statements? Does he back the Chancellor, and will he repeat the statement that the Government will never endorse the social chapter?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman quoted what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said in 1989. The situation has changed since then. I hold to the position that all of us on the Government Front Bench have consistently held for a long time.

Dr. Cunningham: That is not exactly a ringing endorsement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The House is entitled to know whether the Foreign Secretary supports, or will repeat, the statement by the Chancellor that the Government will never endorse the social chapter. Will the Foreign Secretary repeat that commitment? The right hon. Gentleman has ducked it. It is quite obvious that he is not willing to endorse the Chancellor's statement.

During the long process of ratification, one matter that has clearly emerged in this country, as in others, is that there are deep public concerns about the European Community, about recession and the Community's failure to act in the face of 17 million unemployed. There is dissatisfaction about the lack of clarity and openness in the conduct of Community business.

People want more from the Community than just a business market. They want more democratic accountability and more policies for people. Europe is in danger of achieving the worst of all worlds, of being over-intrusive, on the one hand, while being unable or unwilling to act effectively and urgently, on the other. Sadly, the British presidency was an all-too-obvious example of the latter.

Europe currently falls far short of the ambitious goals of article 2 of the treaty. That is why the Community must continue to change and expand. We should work positively for the admission of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Austria to an expanded Community. Europe needs a strategy for growth and employment. The Community can make a unique contribution to extending equality rights for women and for all members of ethnic communities. On environmental protection, the Community can be much more powerful than the sum of its separate member states.

The Bill guarantees none of those things and does not merit our support. The absence of the social chapter guarantees that.

The Home Secretary said that he would search for consensus on development in the Community. It was an odd way to begin to search for consensus by deliberately deciding that Britain, alone in the Community, should opt out of the social chapter.

The Government do not deserve our support tonight. Their tawdry conduct of this business and their abuse of the House have, in some instances, demeaned the House of Commons. Above all, their miserable, negative, conservative view of Europe is one that we cannot share and will not endorse. That is why we will be staying out of the Lobby tonight.

5.30 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Today's debate is vital, which is why it will be watched closely by the leaders of the other member states of the Community, their parliamentarians, their business men and their professions. The United States and other countries will also be watching this debate.

The other countries have had a year during which they did not know what Britain would do about future developments in the Community. That has undermined their confidence, their preparedness to invest and their willingness to do business with us. Tonight is the time to settle the issue. That is why those countries will be watching and listening——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): They will be watching the cup final tonight.

Sir Edward Heath: Strangely enough, they know that the result of this debate will come after the cup final—and the last thing they want is another draw.

As a Back Bencher, I join those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who have paid tribute to the work of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State during the year that the Maastricht discussions have been taking place in this House. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his consistency in what has been one of the most difficult years for any British Prime Minister since the second world war. I applaud the elegance and fluency of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the tireless patience—which most of us could not begin to emulate —of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. We should express our gratitude to them for what they have done, because it has been invaluable.

However, I hope that my right hon. Friends in return will spare a moment's thought for those of us who, in supporting their work, have refrained from intervening in the discussions and thereby taking up Government time. That attitude has not only helped to prevent our debates on Maastricht from being prolonged, but has prevented the disruption of the Government's other business that otherwise would have occurred. I hope that that will be acknowledged.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that we who had for so long supported the Community and its continuing development are now out of date. He said the time for Community ideals was over and that nation states would be the answer to everything. I am afraid that I regard my right hon. Friend as the one who is out of date. Basically, he is going back to the Hague conference and saying that everything can be done through co-operation.

The truth is that in the years after that conference the countries of Europe that had been wrecked—where people were living in holes in the ground—found that they could not get the action needed simply by saying, "We will co-operate." That is still true today and it is why the treaties of Paris and Rome were created. Those treaties require unanimity on certain matters, but majority voting on others. It is the provision for majority voting across a large area that enables action to be taken. It is essential that the Community takes the action described by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), both in dealing with this economically difficult time and in other areas.

Let us consider the actions of the Community over the six years from 1986 to 1992. It created the single market. I willingly join my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in paying the greatest possible tribute to the intellectual capacity of our leader at the time. It is not a characteristic that I had noticed before, but I accept it. By contrast, Britain has spent six years discussing whether there should be a fast rail link to meet the channel tunnel, and we are still discussing whether there should be and, if so, where it should be.

That is the difference between what has been happening in the Community—and it has been so since 1950—and what has been and is happening in this country. As President Mitterrand so charmingly put it, we are far behind our colleagues in the European Community.

That is why I am so sorry that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary puts such emphasis on the word "co-operation". It needs more than co-operation if we are to get decisions in the Community. All the other Community countries and their Governments realise that and they have always accepted it. The people—not just the Governments and the politicians—of all those other countries have become very suspicious of us because we continue to say, "We will co-operate, but we must not allow further development in the Community. We must extend the Community and become wider and wider, but must say nothing about becoming deeper and deeper."

Those people then say, "Ah, Britain wants to bring in other countries so that they can help it to break the fundamental nature of the Community." That is the heavy suspicion under which Britain suffers at the moment, and that must be put right. That is why I asked my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to concentrate on the other aspects of the Community described in the treaty.

I wish that the Opposition would vote for the treaty tonight. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and one or two other Ministers are out of date in harking back to what the Labour party did in 1950 when it was in power and the Community was born, what it did in 1961, and so on. That is history, and historians will deal with it. What is important is that at last the Labour party and the trade union movement have officially accepted our membership of the Community. That is basic to our country's welfare and our position in the Community.

I understand why the Opposition are not supporting the Bill tonight. They want to expose the grievous breaches in the ranks of the Conservative party. It is a political reason and I do not blame them for that. However, I believe that I am right in saying that the Labour party is

[Sir Edward Heath]

the only social democratic or labour party in the Community that has not voted in support of the Maastricht treaty.

Dr. John Cunningham: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for being generous to my party. He has certainly been more objective than his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. However, the truth is that the socialist and social democratic parties in the Community have voted for the whole of the treaty. We have not been given the opportunity to do that.

Sir Edward Heath: The right hon. Gentleman has made his point about the social chapter and he knows full well that there will be another debate on it after the Bill is passed. Therefore, surely he should say, "We have made our point, the House can now reach a decision and we intend to show that, like other social democratic and labour opposition parties in the Community, we will support the Maastricht treaty." I wish the right hon. Gentleman had said that.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: I am trying to make only a brief speech.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Does not my right hon. Friend think that the very fact that every socialist party in Europe supports the Maastricht treaty is cause for us to have considerable concern about it?

Sir Edward Heath: That remark was not worthy of my hon. Friend and he knows it. I said every socialist and labour opposition party in the Community——

Sir Peter Tapsell: The right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said it was every socialist party.

Sir Edward Heath: But I said that it was every social and labour opposition party. That is going back to the attitude of the Labour party in 1950 which said, "If we do this, it will be an entirely Conservative Community." That was nonsense, and it was rapidly proved to be nonsense.

In the Community today we have Conservative Governments—the Germans have had a Conservative Government for years and there are other Conservative Governments—and socialist Governments. How can my hon. Friend, who has contributed so much to the House over the years, make an intervention of that kind? I am sorry.

When it comes to the social chapter, I would ask my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government to move with extreme caution. I do not accept the figures that have been given by the Government or, in particular, by the Secretary of State for Employment on the consequences of the social chapter, and nor do the majority of people in the Community. Further than that, they do not see how we can reconcile our demand that there should be a level playing field with our opting out of the majority of arrangements that affect that playing field. It is just not logically a consistent position.

Of course, I join the right hon. Member for Copeland in deploring the British consul's advertisement in Dusseldorf. It is deplorable. I understand that it was certainly not put in with the approval of the Secretary of State for Employment or, I doubt, with the approval of the Foreign Office or the Government. But to advertise in Germany that we can provide sweated labour, that and, the quicker workers come here the better, is unworthy of this country. I hope, therefore, that that will be made clear.

We heard just now about Germany and its difficulties, but its difficulties are not because it created a high level of wages. We ourselves fought the election on high wages, high productivity and low cost, and that should be the objective of every economy. That is what the Germans achieved. What have their difficulties come from today? Not from what brought about their previous achievements but from the fact that they have taken responsibility for 18 million people with a standard of living on only one fifth of their own which they are determined to bring up as quickly as possible to that of western Germany. That is what has provided the problems for them.

We can all agree—they agree themselves—that the Germans underestimated the problem. Those of us who have been across eastern Germany knew what the situation was, how appalling it was and what a major task it would be. Now they find that, because of that situation, 80 per cent. of all the investment in eastern Germany has to come from the Government because private enterprise is not prepared to try to put the situation right.

For taking responsibility for 18 million people, the Germans deserve credit, not to be laughed at. What have we done, what have other countries done, comparable with that? We have taken 4,000 refugees, I think, and they have taken 18 million people. Who is prepared to take over Poland and say, "We will look after you and put you right"? Who is prepared to take over Bulgaria and say, "We will look after you and put you right"? Nobody. That is why we must treat what the Germans have done with great respect. Therefore, I ask the Foreign Secretary to treat the question of the social chapter with caution because we have been caught out on so many things lately.

When it comes to the question of the political arrangements, subsidiarity and so on, the whole point of the Community is to do more and more together because in that way better results can be achieved. We should not spend all our time looking around for things on which we can say that we should have a special arrangement to contract out.

Let us look at the things that we can make a success of. We have heard them listed today—jobs and all the other things that are required. That is where the emphasis should be. As long as we are seen to be a country that is emphasising wider and wider and more and more responsibilities, not going deeper and deeper in order to cope with them, we are suspect.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My right hon. Friend has made great play of the historical context in which the European Community has moved. Will he now take this opportunity, in what he has described as an historic debate, to repudiate that part of the White Paper that he presented to Parliament in 1970 which said that we would not give up the veto, that we would retain our essential sovereignty and that this country would never become part of a federation of provinces or countries? During the past few months he has repeatedly accused others of misleading. Will he be good enough to put the record straight by repudiating that White Paper?

Sir Edward Heath: I shall do absolutely nothing of the sort. What the hon. Gentleman has done is to distort what other people have done before him. I heard the hon. Gentleman on television, I think that it was two nights ago, saying that the French referendum really was lost, not won, by the Government.

Mr. Cash: I never said anything of the kind.

Sir Edward Heath: I heard the hon. Gentleman. He said that if the French had another referendum they would lose it. Then he said that the referendum in—[HON. MEMBERS: "Denmark."]—yes, it was Denmark—was bogus because the second result was different from the first one. That does not stand examination. The Foreign Secretary made a rather critical remark about Members such as the hon. Gentleman—my hon. Friends—who went across to Denmark and interfered. I wish that he would not be critical of them. [HON. MEMBERS: "What were you doing?" [I was invited by the Conservative party. I was invited by the former Prime Minister, so I went. The plain fact is —every day will confirm this——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): They helped us.

Sir Edward Heath: Of course they helped us. They helped us enormously. The speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and the way in which he behaved was an enormous help to the yes campaign, and so was Lord Tebbit.

Mr. Budgen: Why do you hate him then?

Sir Edward Heath: Because I would much rather behave like the rest of us than like the hon. Gentleman.

In conclusion, I want to deal with the economic side of things because I understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will reply to the debate. Here again we have a crucial point. I should like my right hon. Friend tonight to tell the House exactly what happened over the devaluation of sterling. All the Europeans know. All the banks know. They talk to us about it and tell us what really happened. I think that the Chancellor should tell the House, quite openly and frankly, the details of what happened in that ghastly period.

When offered a devaluation, working with other countries, it was refused, it was turned down. That may have been because just before that the Prime Minister had said that we would have the strongest currency in the Community and the best economy in the Community. I understand the Chancellor's embarrassment if he then felt that he could not accept the proposal. But all the rest know what really happened. Then, when it came to black Wednesday, we had no friends in the Community at all. That goes to the crux of the matter. If we are to be successful, we must have friends in this world today.

Sir Peter Tapsell: With friends like that, we do not need enemies.

Sir Edward Heath: Like what?

Sir Peter Tapsell: Well, if we had no friends on black Wednesday, what is the point of the ERM?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here quite long enough to know that interventions that have not been accepted by the hon. Member who has the Floor are not in order.

Sir Edward Heath: If we had had friends, we would not have been in the position in which we found ourselves. The French have not had a black Wednesday because they had friends who supported them. We have not got them. That is the plain fact.

The Government must make friends in the Community. Every time that we say, "Now we will turn this Community into what we want," we lose friends; we do not make friends. The Government and the Foreign Secretary must realise that. Every time that we say that we will turn the Community into what we want, the others say, "We are not a colony of the British; we are a Community. We want them to help us to create the Community that we want."

I beseech the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and members of the Government not to make commitments about the ERM. If I may say so, our friends in the Government have got enough troubles already with the commitments that they have made on which they are now having to back. As far as the country's financial arrangements are concerned, I have said before that Governments never used to commit themselves to a lowest or highest rate of taxation. They said, "We can use these as weapons in any given economic situation." That is the situation today in respect of the currency in Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that the single market is absolutely basic and that it was the Government's great achievement. Very well—but one cannot point to a single market in the world that has more than one currency. The United States has a single currency. There are enormous differences between the states. Who is to say that Arkansas is in the same situation as California or New York State?

If we do not have a single currency, the single market will be chipped at the edges, and then it will crack and disappear, because the other trading countries will say, "You're cheating—and if you're cheating on your currencies, then we must cheat as well." That will destroy the single market. That must be faced, for a single currency is logical and can be brought about perfectly well in a comparatively short time.

Every time that we say that we cannot do that—worst of all, that we cannot do it in the lifetime of this Parliament —the other member states ask, "Are you part of our Community or not?" Those are the facts of Community life with which we must deal. I support the Government's action. I am sorry that it has gone on so long. I wish them every success.

The reason for the Northern Ireland referendum was that we closed its Parliament, so there was no other way of learning the opinion of the people of Northern Ireland. There is no Parliament for Scotland or for Wales, so the referendum was a way of testing opinion. We do have a Parliament, which has already taken a decision.

If the House of Lords is urged to overthrow that decision, we shall have a major constitutional crisis. The House of Lords knows perfectly well that it has never taken any part in electoral arrangements or electoral law. If it is to be urged to do that now, that House will be going back nearly a century and will produce a constitutional crisis—and we can well do without that. I trust in the common sense of the House of Lords and that it will not have anything to do with motions to secure a referendum or anything like that. Having progressed the Bill quickly through the House of Lords, I hope that the Government will really put it into effect.

[Sir Edward Heath]

We are the last in the line, which is not the place that I like my country to be in. I doubt whether the House does either.

5.52 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was, as ever, direct and consistent. He said that we need not more co-operation but more than co-operation —the capacity to make decisions—and that decisions could not be made simply on the basis of unanimity. I agree entirely. The right hon. Gentleman's remarks about honesty and openness in respect of black Wednesday were salutary and we look forward to hearing the Chancellor of the Exchequer's response.

As the Foreign Secretary said, it has been a long process. Occasionally, it has been a wearisome process and certainly fraught at times. There have been moments of mystery, such as when the Attorney-General, like a high priest coming down from on high—but looking surprisingly normal, nevetheless—interpreted the holy writ of the law with unfathomable confidence. I thought that, as the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said, the Foreign Secretary was perhaps a little less confident when he offered his legal interpretation. In fact, the Foreign Secretary looked downright embarrassed. Still, both succeeded equally admirably in being unfathomable.

Good speeches were made in all parts of the House. I may disagree with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), but I neither dispute nor deprecate his passionate sincerity. Nor do I cavil at the forthright consistency of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), with whom I have been locking horns for 15 to 20 years. I have never believed that a good way of persuading those with whom one disagrees is to shout at them or abuse them. That is the last thing that will succeed. Why should I cast aspersions against the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)? He has been saying the same thing for 20 years. That may mean that he is not learning very well, but he is certainly entitled to his views. I do not complain about the Euro-sceptics.

Sometimes, good things happen to one. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has temporarily disappeared. I do not complain even about him too much, except that I wish sometimes that he would moderate his decibel level, because he is rather wearying otherwise. I compliment also the Minister of State, who has also vanished temporarily, and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson)—both of whom were articulate and patient throughout a long Committee stage and both of whom, I believe, are privately well ahead of their respective parties in their views on the European Community.

I will say something about the way in which it was done, if I may use that term. We should have had a timetable at the beginning, which would have made matters much more straightforward, easier and fairer. In fact, there was a timetable, because there were closures and suspensions of the 10 o'clock rule. Labour would not play. It was not prepared to facilitate the Bill's procedural advance, so we had to do so—and we did. That was not always easy for us, and nor was it easy for the Government. It must be very galling for a Government to rely for certain things on a minority party.

I must say that the Government Chief Whip and the pairing Whip, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), were straight and courteous with us throughout. I say that because it is true. Nevertheless, it was odd that the Foreign Secretary made no reference to the fact that we have reached this point tonight because we did all that. The Conservative and Liberal parties were engaged in ferocious local government contests at the time in question and the Newbury by-election was held then as well. It was not easy for everybody, but it was all achieved.

I am told that there were dungeons beneath the Government Whip's Office, in which Euro-sceptics hung from chains in dank, miserable darkness, although I never saw them. The House is always going on about how marvellous it is to have independently minded Members of Parliament who speak their minds. Sometimes when they do that, men in big boots come and try to trample them down. There is something contradictory about that.

The main issue was the social chapter. We shared Labour's objective of manoeuvring the Government into the position where they had to choose between having the Maastricht treaty with the social chapter or no Maastricht treaty. That may yet be achieved by new clause 74. It has been a strange experience, watching an elected Parliament being denied the chance to make a decision on a issue about which it wants to make a decision. In fact, it was all very unreal.

If one compares the treaty of Rome as amended by the Single European Act and its social chapter, with the social chapter of the Maastricht treaty, one sees that there is no profound difference between them. The Prime Minister had to return from Maastricht with some triumphs, so he said that he had saved us from creeping corporatism and creeping continental socialism.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) put his foot gently into Denmark for a moment when he made a few slightly grumpy remarks, which called forth thunderbolts of various kinds from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). The right hon. Member for Henley said that all the competition from the far east would force on the other countries of the European Community the attitude that his party adopts with regard to social conditions, wages, and so on. But the right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. If pressure from the European Community is to have this effect, what is the problem about signing the social chapter? There is no problem. I do not understand that attitude.

In one of the best speeches of the entire Committee stage, the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) clearly and incisively made the point that, even if the social chapter were not signed, competition policy would result in our arriving at the same destination. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said the same thing a few moments ago. If competition is seen to be unfair, someone will certainly bring the matter to the European Court. We should certainly do so were we to find ourselves in that position.

Then there is the question of federalism. This is another illusion. There are many mirrors here. The Prime Minister came back from Maastricht and said that this fearful word had been excised. But that does not make a dock leaf of a difference. The Foreign Secretary dredged up a quotation from a recent speech by Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Well,

Chancellor Kohl makes many speeches of some length, but they are certainly consistent. We all know perfectly well that it is nonsense to pretend that the Chancellor of Germany is not a committed federalist who believes that federalism means decentralised government.

As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup knows better than most, it does not finish there. The next stage of the argument will be about how the show is to be run constitutionally. This will include proportional representation. I resent the attitude of those who say that PR is of no importance or significance. It is both significant and important. It is about democracy. I deny totally the idea that it is a trivial matter. In the entire European Community, together with countries in what was the European free trade area, this is the only country that does not have a fair voting system. Please let us have no more such comments about proportional representation.

I do not intend to say much about European monetary union. I shall not spend a great deal of time on currency convergence and banks.

Mr. Shore: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to remarks that I made. So that there may be no misunderstanding, I should say that I am not necessarily opposed to a referendum on the future of our electoral system. I was referring to the incredible lack of proportion between those who can find it in their hearts to argue that we should have a referendum before changing our system of voting but, at the same time, would deny us a referendum on the Maastricht treaty, which is of far greater importance.

Sir Russell Johnston: The right hon. Gentleman is certainly entitled to his views, but I could hardly feel any less represented in the European Community than I feel now, and have felt for many years. Thus, the right hon. Gentleman is not entirely entitled to say what he has just said.

On the question of European monetary union, I do not see how we can have a single market without a single currency. However, the timetable will have to be revised. I gather that Luxembourg is now the only country that meets the criteria. Changing timetables is nothing new. The European Community has operated on that basis all along. If timetables are not set, one does not do anything. If one cannot keep to a timetable, one stops the clock. But the clock cannot be stopped for ever, and after time the only way to move forward is to make another timetable.

The Government have argued for Maastricht less on the basis of its content than on the basis of the exceptions that they managed to achieve. That is hardly a clarion call. More seriously, they simply, in effect, reject the idea of further effective democratic integration. The Foreign Secretary made that very clear. The Government believe that, somehow, it is possible to have an effective working Community with a good deal of provision in respect of the environment and in other fields—with a single market—and, simultaneously, to retain the old sovereign state with all its powers more or less unimpaired. That cannot be done.

This is a very important point. The Government talk about changing little things. It seems to me that what has been missing throughout recent stages of this debate is a grand design, a hope, an aim, an ideal—something to work for.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is called survival.

Sir Russell Johnston: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that it is about survival.

What about the hon. Gentleman's party—the Labour party? No doubt it, too, is interested in survival. The Labour party's spokesman explained at some length why he would not vote for the Third Reading. I did not find his argument very compelling. What sort of leadership is that? I read the magazine of the House of Commons occasionally. The other day I read in that publication an article by the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who may have written it in the hope that nobody would read it—we all do that sort of thing. He said that we must have a single currency and a central bank. He has not made that point very loudly in the Chamber.

What do Liberal Democrats want? We believe that a single market is good, but that it cannot work without a single currency, an agreed social policy and common rules on competition and regional regeneration. Only in that way is it possible to achieve growth and employment. We believe that a coherent community needs a common foreign and defence policy to solve internal problems and achieve external influence—internal problems like Yugoslavia; external influence with the United States and Japan.

We believe in a strengthened European Parliament, fairly elected, at the democratic heart of the Community. It must certainly relate to the Council of Ministers, as that is the nature of a federal approach, but it must act openly. We are supranationalists, whereas the Government are intergovernmentalists. That is a basic difference, and the argument will be rehearsed again and again over the coming months and years.

The Maastricht treaty refers to the role that transnational political parties will increasingly play. That is the way forward for Brits and Germans and Dutch and Danes. They will not be in any way ashamed—indeed, they will be particularly proud—of their distinctive cultures, languages and history, but they will co-operate in respect of economic, political and social matters across national divides. In determining these issues, national divides are not the central concern. We want the common good in Europe, and that is what we shall continue to work for.

6.9 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and, indeed, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who made a powerful and compelling speech. I have slightly less confidence in the effectiveness of the 204 hours and 23 days of debate than was demonstrated by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

I was not here for all the debates, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was here for quite a few of them, and when I look back on them I wonder precisely what we have achieved. True, we have turned a Bill that was one and a quarter pages long into a Bill that is one and a half pages long. I have to be careful in saying this, because I know how much this House treasures its privileges and its place as the mother of Parliaments and the mother of democracy, but one reason why so many people in Britain

[Mr. Tim Renton]

became so determined and anxious to have a referendum was, I believe, because they thought that we were wasting a great deal of time on trivia.

There were times when the legal significance of our debates seemed to be totally incomprehensible to many of those outside the House. That is why the cry for a referendum, which I do not agree with, was magnified. That is the lesson that we have to remember, if this Parliament is to be convincing in future debates of such enormous constitutional importance.

If we are to convince the outside world that our debates are of great significance, it is important that we do not waste time—by, for example, the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) spying strangers at 3 o'clock in the middle of the night and leading between 450 and 500 grown-up men and women back into the Chamber on a farcical excuse. How can one mention that sort of incident to politicians and friends on the continent and then pretend that we in this House are treating the Maastricht treaty with all seriousness? When behaviour of that kind is reported, it seems like a farce.

I hope that one of the benefits of this long debate is that we reform our procedures by the time of the next intergovernmental conference so that the mother of Parliaments, this Westminster Parliament that we all love so much, regains respect. When we have the son of Maastricht treaty, which is only four years away, I hope that we shall debate it fully in a two or three-day debate and that at the end of that debate we, like the French or the Spanish, will come to a firm conclusion and decide whether to ratify the treaty, or otherwise.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said, the great issues are now unfolding before us as a result of the Maastricht treaty and the Bill that we are to ratify, I hope by a very large majority, tonight. The first of those great issues is the exchange rate mechanism. That question will not go away. What we have to consider, and what I am sure my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench must consider, is how we are to reform, with our continental friends, the processes of the exchange rate mechanism so that we, and the Italians, can join it again.

According to the treaty, on 1 January 1994, a mere seven months away, stage 2 of the process towards economic and monetary union starts. Under stage 2, we are committed to moving the Bank of England to independence from political control. One has only to read article 109e, paragraph 5, to see that. I hope that we shall take that course early on. When I look at countries with independent central banks—notably the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany—I see, despite the hiccups in Germany at present, that those countries have shown over decades consistently higher rates of growth since 1945 than we have.

One conclusion must be that bankers, not politicians, are better at deciding questions of monetary growth and consequential interest rates. It is not necessarily that they have better brains than we have, but they do not have to operate within the same electoral four-year-cycle as we do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—I am sorry that he is not in his place at the moment—made a key intervention and, with his typical trenchancy, said that the important thing now is to have a more democratic Europe, with proper controls over what is done in Brussels and Strasbourg. I am convinced that the way that we shall achieve a more democratic Europe is by a deeper examination of the powers of the European Parliament.

Next year, the European Parliament holds its elections. We, surely, have to be ready with our decisions and our thoughts about the increase in the powers of that Parliament in good time for the 1996 intergovernmental conference. So many times in the past few months I have heard, as many other hon. Members must have heard, the comment, "I believe in Europe, but I don't like the Maastricht treaty. Despite subsidiarity, if I understand what that means, the treaty adds to the scope of and provides the Commission with too many new powers." Even those of us who believe strongly in Europe cannot arrogantly brush away that criticism.

So what is the answer? It must lie in more democracy within a powerful Community for the European Parliament and greater accountability and openness in the Council of Ministers. That is one of the problems for this Parliament of ours at Westminster. We have never really come to accept the European Parliament. We have to learn not only to live with it but to realise that it is not just a talking shop. It must become, and we must help it to become, a more effective brake on the Commission and, at times, on the Council of Ministers.

Inevitably, that will mean more power and control moving from his House, not to the Commission—that is the Whitehall, the civil service of the Community—but to the European Parliament. I realise that that is a difficult concept for hon. Members to accept. I accept it. Our task, after ratification of this treaty, over the next three years is to examine how that can effectively be done. What are we to give to the European Parliament? Are we to give more power to investigate the management committees? Are we to give it First, Second and Third Reading powers over all new policy areas where there is majority voting in the Council of Ministers? These issues will have to be examined. What we cannot do is to demand more democracy within the Community and yet not seriously consider the question of how to make the European Parliament work more effectively.

We must certainly also consider the role of the Council of Ministers. How can we help it to act more visibly, more transparently, so that what the Council of Ministers does can be seen by the constituents of the member states of the Community? I realise that the Danes have tried that. They held a few open or televised sessions of the Council of Ministers. It did not work too well, but that is no reason for giving up the experiment. The thoughts and conclusions of the Council of Ministers must be seen to be openly and freely available to their European constituents.

Slowly, therefore, we in this House have to come to terms, while we look for more democracy, with the fact that we are part of the continent of Europe. Let me remind the House, before I sit down, of the famous words of John Donne:

> "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less".

Britain, we all know, will always be an island, but reluctantly we have to accept that in the 21st century we shall inevitably and inextricably be part of the European continent as well. Our job in this House is to merge those two ideals—insularity and European statehood.

6.19 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I am conscious of being the first Member to speak in this Third Reading debate who hopes that the Bill will be negatived. Hon. Members have spoken well, but regardless of what side of the House they have spoken from they have all seemed to send out the same message.

The reality is that, in this year-long debate, we have witnessed the unspoken alliance of the leaders of all three political parties and their joint determination to ratify the Maastricht treaty. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen have made their points about the social chapter, but, as we shall see later, they are quite willing to accept the Maastricht treaty even though it does not contain a social chapter.

It was interesting to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) defending himself against accusations of Labour-wrecking, as it were, and saying that the Labour party could have destroyed the Maastricht treaty on many occasions if it had wanted to. My God, I wish that he had wished to do just that. If he had, he would have earned the thanks of a large proportion of the British people—including, I am glad to say, as he will soon find out, the great majority of ordinary Labour party members, supporters and trade unionists.

Dr. John Cunningham: The reason why we did not want to do that is quite simple: it was not the policy decision that was taken by our conference, which my right hon. Friend refuses to accept.

Mr. Shore: I have never taken the view that, on matters of major constitutional and political importance, my decision about how I should vote in the best interests of my constituents, my party and my country should be dictated by a majority vote at our annual conference—never. That is the doctrine to which I hope every member of the Labour party would subscribe. We take note, we take seriously and we consider what our annual conference has to say, which is fair, but to use it as the authority for refusing to act in the interests of the country and of our constituents is absolutely repugnant.

It is exactly a year since the Second Reading debate. It has been an interesting and important year. Taking full account of the last Danish referendum—I do not think that there will be a third one, but perhaps the best of three might be the way of deciding it—I wish to say how profoundly grateful I am to those sturdy people in Denmark who value self-government and independence in their own country to the point where they turned over their own political establishment and voted no. Their referendum of 2 June gave people, not only in Britain but all over Europe, the chance to think again and to look far more searchingly into what their political leaders had committed them to.

As we all know, what emerged across Europe was the recognition that there was indeed a classe politique—the professional Europeans, the professional politicians who were dedicated to the European idea and ever closer European union. For example, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) is now an open federalist.

There are disguised federalists, too, many of whom feel that it is imprudent to state too early what the real objective is. For example, the Foreign Secretary denies what is on the face of the treaty and does not recommend to the House what everyone else in Europe thinks it contains but says that Britain has not gone along with certain things and how remarkably successful the Government have been in negotiation. I think that they have had some successes in negotiation. They have not signed up for stage 3 of European monetary union. I should have thought that that was a matter of congratulation, but I find that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen want stage 3 of EMU as well; they are not content with what they are getting.

It is especially on the economic side that the gravest damage is to be done—not only to our economic interest and the British people but to the people of Europe as well. I shall devote most of my remarks to that matter, but let no one have any doubt that my feelings are equally strong about the transfer of powers, the loss of self-confidence and the willingness of Members of Parliament, in this of all Parliaments, to hand over the powers of their constituents and their country to alien institutions abroad and to abide by the decisions that are made there.

Let me deal with the economic issues, which greatly disturb me. Last year, 16·2 million people were unemployed throughout the Community—about 9·3 per cent.—but today the figure is 17·5 million, or more than 10 per cent. According to a Commission report, the outlook for growth in the European economy in 1993 is 0·7 per cent., which, as the House will well know, is quite insufficient to sustain the present level of employment. Productivity in the European Community is currently growing by roughly 2·5 per cent., but unemployment will increase next year because it is forecast that production will grow by only 0·7 per cent. In addition, the more recent forecast of the International Monetary Fund expects growth within the European Community to be 0·1 per cent. this year.

The recession is biting deep. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, who gave figures for Germany and other European countries, knows only too well how industrial production has collapsed in many countries. The European Community faces a very serious problem. Everyone, especially those who are feeling the burdens of recession, is saying, "We are trapped. We want to do something. Why cannot we have programmes and policies to expand the economy and combat rising unemployment?" We all know the reason why. No European Community country can set interest rates lower than the Bundesbank's base rate, which is just under 8 per cent. Interest rates in other member states must therefore not be lower than 8 per cent.

Japan and America, which are not as badly afflicted as Europe, are worried about recession. What are their interest rates? Are they 8 per cent.? Not a bit of it. Both have rates which are less than 3·5 per cent. That is part of the difference. Why cannot European countries lower their interest rates and enormously boost growth, employment and so on? Because they are stuck in the exchange rate mechanism, and the treaty tries to keep them in it. Only the markets, operating in the most tumultuous way, can change their treaty obligation to maintain exchange rates in the fixed parity. It is quite crazy.

The only country, as the Chancellor well knows, that has partially escaped and whose growth prospect this year is better than 0·1 per cent. is Britain. Our growth prospect is 1·6 per cent. That is nothing to cheer about, but it is all right compared with the rest; and we have the lowest interest rates in the European Community. Ours are lower

[Mr. Shore]

than Germany's, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) did not believe was possible. I well remember asking him in earlier debates, "What is the use of having sovereignty in the sense of control over interest rates and exchange rates? It means 25 minutes of freedom before adjusting to fall into line with the Germans"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

6.29 pm

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): I welcome the Third Reading of the Bill, for which I firmly intend to vote. I hope that the House will not forget that—as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said—the treaty was not of Britain's seeking. Of course we could not turn our backs on what had happened at Maastricht, but it was inevitable that the Prime Minister was faced with a damage limitation exercise, and he and his colleagues in the Government deserve our thanks for the skill and persistence with which they have conducted it. The same cannot be said of the Bill's opponents, from whichever party. Conservative opponents of the Bill will receive no thanks from me today.

I am not prepared to go as far as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), but it will be a long time before some of us forget the disgraceful sight of corridor conspiracies being conducted with the Opposition Chief Whip aimed solely at frustrating the business of the Government whom the hon. Members involved were elected to support. I can understand that hon. Members may be slow to forgive colleagues who sloped into the Opposition Lobby, then sought to blame the Government for spending so much time on the Bill. I must say in his absence that it surprises me that my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) still seems to be regarded by the press as the true voice of the loyal right.

However, those are side considerations. The rebels have marginalised themselves and will find themselves in curious company in the Lobby tonight. But that is their affair and need not worry the House as a whole—it is more important to look forward. Much has happened since the first day of Maastricht. There have been significant changes in Europe and we need a few agenda. I am delighted to have had the Prime Minister's testimony that rejoining the exchange rate mechanism is not on the agenda for Britain. I warmly welcome the statement that he made yesterday on the BBC when he said that the conditions for considering re-entry—let alone re-entry itself—do not currently apply. I believe that they are unlikely to do so for a long time.

The enlargement of the Community must be a high priority, and I have no doubt that the Government will press actively for that. I am also sure that we can rely on my right hon. Friends to press on with their campaign against the over-regulation that the Community has inflicted on us and which our own bureaucrats have so often succeeded in compounding. We must finish spring cleaning the nooks and crannies that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary identified a while ago.

Just as we must ensure that unnecessary rules and regulations go, so we must ensure that all our partners comply with necessary rules. The latest report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry highlighted sectors in which Government action is still needed to secure fair competition, eliminate illegal state aids and ensure a level playing field. I hope that that task is high on Whitehall's agenda.

Whatever the agenda, hon. Members must never forget that they have been chosen to represent Britain's interests. Our purpose in seeking to be at the heart of Europe is not to try to dominate Europe, as France and others have always feared that Germany would. It is right to seek to make the most of our own skills and strengths, which is why it is vital that we should not allow ourselves to be shackled by the social chapter.

At a time when our industrial costs are lower than those of Germany, why does the Labour party want us to throw away that advantage? Does it believe that to do so would strengthen our economy or create more jobs? We can only prepare ourselves to face the mounting competition from outside Europe if we are strong enough to compete inside Europe. I can illustrate how intense world competition is likely to become. Last week I heard of a firm in Germany that has decided to relocate its research facility in India because the top rate for a computer programmer in Bangalore is one tenth of that in Berlin. Against such a background, we must identify the fierce competition that we are about to face.

Another major change since the Maastricht process began is the recession that the Germans have entered. I expect that, being Germans, they will have a good—or, should I say, thorough—recession. France is threatened by the same sort of force, although, under its new Government, it has a better chance of surviving it. Those factors show why we have every reason to reject the millstone of the social chapter.

My hon. Friends and others who seem to fear that the treaty will lead to outright political union in an inevitable super-state in Europe should not forget the lesson of Bosnia. What is happening in the former Yugoslavia poses a potential threat to peace in the whole of Europe, and we must not ignore it. But simply because Britain is fortunate enough to have the best Army in Europe, it must not allow itself to be cast in the role of Europe's policeman. We must sometimes work with others, but we must not surrender sovereignty over our armed forces or the rights of the House. I am sure that the Government recognise that.

Bosnia can only provide a damage limitation exercise for Europe, just as Maastricht has been for Britain. If we are sensible enough to see things as they are, we shall realise that there is still a great deal that we can achieve to build the sort of Europe that we want. Tonight's vote is a necessary step towards that goal.

6.35 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Tonight's vote on Third Reading will have a pre-set majority. But not one hon. Member has the legal or moral authority to hand over the powers that they borrowed from their electors last April to people who will not be accountable to those whom we now represent. Not one of us put the Maastricht treaty before the electorate last year, because it was not then published in English. We offered them no choice—the Labour party, without any conference authority, decided to support the treaty. I know that the Labour party had no authority,

because the Maastricht treaty was negotiated after the conference, which intervened before the manifesto was written.

The problem for those who are passionate about Europe is that they cannot offer this country to Europe. Only half the seats in the Chamber are occupied for tonight's debate and the Opposition intend to abstain in the vote. If I were a passionate federalist—which I am not—I would feel more concerned about tonight's vote than anyone else. If others in Europe say that we have supported them, it is not true. The House of Commons, under the Whips, the patronage, the discipline and the disillusionment, has supported them, but not the British people.

A democracy consists not merely of a mechanism of becoming elected and passing a law. It contains the responsibility of gaining the continued consent of the electorate. At the next election I shall have to say to the people of Chesterfield, "Vote for me and I shall fight for you, but do not vote for me to deal with your agricultural, environmental, trade or even foreign policy, and certainly not your economic policy." We are handing over the British people, without their consent, to a system that has replaced parliamentary democracy, which we have been told is the justification for what we are doing tonight.

Would the House have been entitled to take Britain into the United States of America, join the Warsaw pact or invite in Soviet troops without a referendum? Of course not—nobody would believe that for a minute. We have experienced a coup d'etat by a parliamentary elite, not only in this country, but in the whole of Europe. They have abandoned their tasks as representatives and become the managers of Europe.

Mr. Dykes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I should love to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I have an argument that I want to advance and I have only 10 minutes in which to do so.

The House has given up its power, because it has lost interest in its role. I do not think that the House of Commons wants power any more; it has traded status for power. Hon. Members now get on the television and are introduced as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield or whatever, but they do not want power. For them, status is much more important.

The Labour party has adopted a completely new philosophy—that of being in government when not in government. We now have shadow Ministers—the French call them "phantomes", which is appropriate. I heard that my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) went to Paris and *Le Monde* called him le secretaire d'etranger phantome de Britannique. I can imagine people placing entries in "Who's Who" such as "Phantom Prime Minister 1983-1992". We shall have a phantom queen next, who will call for Buckingham palace to be open for two or three months a year at £9·50 a tour.

We have abandoned our representative role, and the same is happening in every country. It is that crisis that lends support to a Ross Perot and Le Pen. As Members of Parliament, we do not represent people; we hope to manage them. If we cannot manage them, we pretend that, if we were to manage them, we would do it better than the Conservative party.

During the election, the Chancellor appeared on a Labour poster as Batman. I thought that it was a Tory poster, trying to make him more attractive to younger voters. What is the point of abuse when there are matters of substance to discuss, such as how to solve unemployment, what sort of Europe we should have and what new world order? We have abandoned all those issues.

I must not be controversial—that is not my practice—but my party, in supporting the Maastricht treaty, has abandoned everything for which the party was established. Others may take a contrary view. The Labour party believed that people had the right through the ballot box to control those who made the laws and, by getting a majority, to change the economic system under which they lived. However, the party has now given it all up. I am not saying that it has done so out of wickedness; it was out of a lack of self-confidence.

I do not think that members of Labour's Front Bench would have even two ideas about what to do with the economy if they came to power, other than with a central bank. I say this with some regret, but a series of sound bites glued together and called an economic policy is not an economic policy. That is the problem—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry to speak sharply, but, if this is my last speech in a free Parliament, I had better say what I think and take the consequences.

I bitterly resent the title "Euro-sceptic". Am I an "Anglo-sceptic" because I did not like the Thatcher Government? I oppose the Maastricht treaty as a European because it takes from every country in Europe the rights that are being taken away from us. It does not offer durability. The treaty has divided every country in Europe—Denmark went one way and then the other, France agreed by a narrow margin and Ireland by a bit more, but in Britain the people are not allowed to vote.

Let no one tell me that proportional representation to put people in an impotent Parliament within a European federation merits a referendum. That is an utterly disreputable argument, and no one will believe it. Labour does not want to have to put to the Labour movement and the public the arguments for the Maastricht treaty and European union, because it knows that those notions would not win support.

A moment ago, someone said that 83 per cent. of the people in Germany want a referendum and two thirds wish that the Danes had voted no. The treaty will fail; that is the tragedy. I shall get no satisfaction from its failure, but it will fail because it cannot be made to work. When it fails, a Bosnian-type crisis will emerge, because one can no more impose capitalism from Brussels than communism from Moscow. It cannot be done—you must carry people with you.

That is why I suggested a commonwealth of Europe, a looser arrangement where harmonisation is by consent. I believe that the crisis in the former Yugoslavia would be much less serious if we had a commonwealth of Europe in which it could find a place without having in place of the iron curtain a gold curtain or a deutschmark curtain, which means that, if one cannot fit in with the policies, one is not acceptable.

I hope that the House will forgive me for speaking with passion. I have often wondered whether, when we lost democracy in Britain, it would be to the red army, the Militant Tendency or Oswald Mosley, but in fact we ourselves have given it up. The House has agreed to abandon its responsibility to hold to account those who make our laws. We have given it all up. Walter Bagehot

[Mr. Benn]

said in the 19th century that the British constitution was divided between the dignified and the efficient. He said that the Queen was the dignified and that the Commons was the efficient. The Executive is now the efficient, and we are the dignified.

We no longer want power. We do not care whether it goes. The nation accepts that because, after centuries of subservience to a monarch whom we cannot elect or remove, we are trained to be subservient. If we learned to live with William the Conqueror, we can learn to live with Jacques Delors. People have been trained—there is a culture of bowing and scraping, going to another place with my Lord this or my Lord that. The nation has never been allowed to develop the equality that comes with birth, to govern oneself as one thinks right and then to collaborate, harmonise and co-operate with other nations.

The idea of one country living alone is absurd. We could be killed by a Chernobyl nuclear disaster or destroyed by a nuclear weapon from China. There is no national sovereignty, but there is a right to choose and remove the people who make our laws. When we vote tonight, under the discipline of the Whips and the patronage system, which is also a corrupting influence, the House will abandon that which makes it a focus of interest and attention for generations of people, from the chartists and the suffragettes until now.

In 1970, we permitted the vote at 18. The meaning of the vote was taken away on 1 January 1973. There were two and a half years of the right of the electorate, but it was too dramatic a power and the Government, without a referendum, took it away. I regret the fact that my right hon. and hon. Friends now hope that they will get more justice from Jacques Delors than from the Government. It is not a policy which any progressive party could pursue.

6.44 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): We have spent more than 200 hours in Committee, mainly debating legal interpretations of the treaty. I shall refer to some of the economic issues and especially to what one might call the intelligent Garrick club member arguments. Those arguments are as follows: first, that Britain belongs to the weakest of the three major trading groups in the world, secondly, that during phase 2, all countries will be required to reduce their deficits to specified levels and there will be determined effort to implement the single currency; and, thirdly, that we shall transfer economic policy from elected Parliaments to non-elected institutions and that the European central bank is insulated from democracy. It was because of that authoritarian power that Charles I lost his head.

On the first point, we need not doubt that economic growth is faster in the far east and likely to be faster for some time in the United States. I do not know whether we are supposed to try to become a member of the American free trade area or its equivalent in the far east, but such a suggestion would be as absurd as it is impractical. We do not need to weaken ourselves by leaving the European Community in order to invest in the United States or the far east, which we already do rather more than any other European country.

We must have the resources to invest in the rapidly growing parts of the world, which means that we cannot afford to weaken ourselves. I fear that that would happen if we failed to ratify the treaty. We have attracted huge amounts of inward investment in recent years, especially from the United States and Japan, and only because we are full members of the European Community. We have attracted some £2,000 million from the Japanese alone, who have employed 70,000 extra people. As a result, we expect our balance of trade in motor vehicles to be in credit within two years and to double car production within the next five years.

As the House will know, a survey was recently carried out for the Confederation of British Industry by an economic research institution. It showed that, if we did not ratify Maastricht, about 47 per cent. of American and Japanese major investors would cease to invest in this country. That is real evidence rather than a matter of legal interpretation, which has been bandied around the House in recent weeks.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Hordern: No, I shall not give way, because, as my hon. Friend knows, time is limited.

Sixty per cent. of our trade is with the European Community. We need a strong home base, which the Community provides, to increase our investment in the United States and the far east. We also need to bring down the tariffs and to make a success of the GATT round. I cannot see how we can make a success of it unless we are a full member of the European Community, negotiating with fellow member countries to bring down the tariffs all over the world and, in particular, in the United States. We can influence the negotiations only from within the European Community.

The second proposition is that, during phase 2, all countries will be required to reduce their deficit to specified levels. I do not think that there is any truth in that. Indeed, the treaty states that, in phase 2, we must

"endeavour to reduce excessive deficits"—

a praiseworthy and commendable thing to do.

As for deficits, the House knows that all European countries, with the possible exception of Luxembourg, are way outside those limits. Belgium—which I suppose is the keenest federalist of all—has a financial deficit of 6·7 per cent. and a debt of 130 per cent. of GDP rather than 60 per cent. Italy has a financial deficit of 10·5 per cent. and growing, and a debt of 105 per cent. The Netherlands—another very federalist country—has a debt of 80 per cent.

Are we seriously to believe that in the next two years those deficits will be reduced by half? Is it seriously to be considered that those countries will cut their public spending by half in the next two to three years, or double their taxation? It is a ludicrous idea. Only an academic, lost in an ivory tower, would believe any such thing. We do not believe in signing up to such an arrangement and hence, very sensibly, my right hon. and hon. Friends have secured the opt-out from that arrangement.

I think that we ought to consider why these convergence factors are in the treaty at all. It is likely that the Bundesbank, the German people and the German Parliament—all of whom have to ratify the single currency and will have the final say—are not happy to abandon the deutschmark. It is quite understandable that, if they are to accept the single European currency, they will demand at least as stringent conditions as are currently applied to the deutschmark. I think they are right to do so. If there were ever to be a single currency, the conditions set out in the

treaty would be sensible; but it is simply not going to happen, because the terms and conditions in the treaty cannot conceivably be met.

The proposition is that the European central bank would be somehow insulated from democracy, and that never in the course of our long island history have we ever been called upon to sacrifice our sovereignty in this way. That is absolute nonsense. Ever since we were on the gold standard, from 1660 onwards—and again under Peel's Bullion Act of 1819—more often than not we have been tied to the gold standard or some other fixed currency. In more recent times, under the Bretton Woods agreement, we were completely fixed to the United States dollar for 22 years, and in that time our monetary policy was conducted not within the Bank of England but by the Federal Reserve of the United States.

If, by any chance, hon. Members should say that that was a deplorable time, I would mention the fact that interest rates were commonly about 3·5 or 4 per cent. at that time, inflation was about 3 per cent. and unemployment about 500,000. Those were halcyon days. I do not see any difficulty, in practice, in our tying ourselves to another currency.

As many of my right hon. and hon. Friends know, for some time I have favoured an independent Bank of England. Many opponents of the Maastricht treaty would like to blame our membership of the ERM for the recession. I say to them that it is worth remembering that, before we joined the ERM, interest rates had been at 15 per cent. for a whole year and at about 14 per cent. for a year before that, and that inflation was at 12 per cent. That was the position before we joined the ERM. We did not join it because of any great enthusiasm of Baroness Thatcher for the European Community; we joined it as a way of dealing with inflation. In that respect at least, it was extremely successful; it brought inflation down from 12 to 5 per cent., and interest rates fell from 15 to 10 per cent.

Of course, it can now be argued in retrospect that we ought to have joined the ERM sooner—I believe that we should have done—and that it might have been very much better if we had devalued the currency within the ERM. There is no case to be made for a floating currency without any regard to other currencies. If we float our currency, it invariably floats downwards, and up goes inflation. That is the record of the last 20 years: there is no denying it. It is not surprising that foreign holders of sterling—to whom we are extremely indebted at the moment, having to borrow some $50 billion—demand a very high price for it, as they will if they think there is any doubt about the level of sterling.

Whether in currency or in trade matters—as in defence or foreign affairs—we cannot act as an island alone. Whether in the GATT negotiations on the negotiations for an enlarged Community—which I think we all wish to see—we need to be at the heart of Europe to help steer it in the right direction, and that is why I am in favour of ratifying the treaty.

6.54 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The positive and decisive result of the Danish referendum—which I welcome—has without doubt radically improved the prospects for ratification of the Maastricht treaty. The truth is that the Danish no last June threw the whole EC into turmoil; another Danish no on Tuesday would certainly have derailed Maastricht and the Bill, even if 10 or possibly even 11 of the 12 member states had joined forces to cobble together a replacement treaty. Thanks to Danish second thoughts, however, Maastricht has survived.

I remain convinced that the Maastricht treaty provides a valuable, indeed essential, framework for the economic, social and political co-operation and integration of the 12 EC countries. Like the Labour party conference, I support the treaty and believe that it should be ratified as soon as possible.

I strongly agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench that the Conservative Government have grossly mishandled the passage of the Bill. It was the Prime Minister himself who specifically linked British progress on the Bill with events in Denmark —first by delaying the Committee stage, and then by saying that Third Reading would not take place until after the Danish referendum. More fundamentally, it was the Government who stifled the emergence of the natural pro-Maastricht majority in the House—thus slowing the Bill's passage—by insisting on the retention of the social chapter opt-out which was negotiated at Maastricht, mainly for internal party-political reasons.

In fact—as was made clear when the Foreign Secretary read out parts of the social chapter—it is a very mild document, which should have caused no alarm to Conservative Members. Everyone knows that, if the Government had been prepared to accept the social chapter, we would have been able to ratify the treaty long ago.

As my hon. Friends have said, the Bill is still incomplete, because it does not contain the social chapter. Even so, I shall be obliged to resist the advice of my right hon. and hon. Friends to abstain in the vote tonight—although that advice was couched in the gentle and attractive guise of a one-line Whip. As you probably know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not a natural rebel. I was encouraged to abstain on Second Reading, and I did so; I was encouraged to support my party in the paving debate, and I did so—although I was given some stick by the Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Democrats for abandoning my European principles. On those occasions, however, I had good reasons. At the time of Second Reading, the Bill did not contain the social chapter; and, in my view, the vote on the paving debate constituted a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister and his Government. On this occasion, however, I shall vote in favour of Third Reading.

Of course, I understand the position of those on the Front Bench. Abstention maximises Labour party unity and helps to exploit divisions in the Tory party. It also underlines the fact that the Bill still does not contain the social chapter. However, unusually for politicians, my Front-Bench colleagues are underestimating and underselling their own achievements in Committee and on Report.

I am not referring to the fact that five out of eight clauses in the Bill are actually Labour amendments, or to the fact that some useful gains have been made with regard to the composition of the Committee of the Regions and economic and institutional accountability. Their most crucial achievement was on the social chapter. The opt-out has always had an uncertain legal and political basis, as any Minister will admit in private. It has always been inherently improbable that two social regimes should

[Mr. Giles Radice]

continue to exist side by side, one for 11 members and the other for the 12th member. The acceptance of amendment No. 2 on Report made it even more unlikely.

When, after ratification, British trade unionists or French, German or Danish business men challenge the social chapter opt-out in the European Court, as they will, the British Government will not now be able to argue that the social protocol, or rather, the British opt-out from it, is part of British law.

What is more, the Government have accepted that the Act will come into force only after a vote on the social opt-out. That was a victory for the Labour party, which I believe it has not made enough of. But we shall have a vote on the social protocol and the British opt-out only if the Bill is given a Third Reading. If the Bill falls there will be no social protocol vote, and, indeed, no social chapter for anyone, because the Maastricht treaty will not be ratified.

I shall vote for Third Reading for all those reasons, and for another, personal reason. I have campaigned in two referendums for a yes vote over the past year—in the French referendum, at the invitation of the French socialists, and in the Danish referendum, at the invitation of the Danish social democrats. Both referendums were won, incidentally.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Well done, Giles.

Mr. Radice: Fortunately my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) did not go over to Denmark; otherwise the majority would have been even bigger.

Even with an incomplete Maastricht Bill, it would be inconsistent if, when it came to my turn, I were to abstain. So I shall vote for Third Reading.

7.1 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Like my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, I welcome the likelihood that the House will give the Bill a Third Reading despite the bizarre and faintly ridiculous position of the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen, to which the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) is an honourable exception. I do not know how many more exceptions there will be.

I welcome the likelihood of the Bill's securing a Third Reading, not because I regard the Maastricht treaty as perfect in all aspects—it has many faults and problems—but because ratification will clear the way and enable us to get on with our ideas and proposals for developing a Europe to meet the real priorities of the 1990s and of the next millennium, rather than the backward-looking hopes of a previous era. It will enable us to focus on 1996 and to develop the ideas on which the Foreign Secretary has already touched for designing a decentralised Europe resting on the authority and legitimacy of the nation states—a modern design, not an old-fashioned, over-centralised structure.

Ratification will also enable us to get on with the single market, which is far from complete. It may work well for British beer drinkers who visit Calais—in fact, it is working too well in that respect—but in general there are many hurdles yet to be overcome before we can make the great single market yield its full benefit to this country.

I also dare to hope that ratification will provide us with an opportunity to unite the Conservative party. I do not believe that the Euro-rebels should be hated for ever. I regard that as a ridiculous statement, and I see the validity of many of their concerns. Nevertheless, I believe that in putting the Maastricht Bill and the principle—although not the process—of ratification behind us, we have an opportunity for what Enoch Powell once described as the elaboration of a mental map, a map that we can honestly all share about the way in which Europe should develop and the way in which we should operate within it. In approaching that work, we now have the opportunity of a completely new context within which to operate.

Almost every Government have been in severe difficulties within the European Community; indeed, almost all the democracies have been in difficulties. That is because the context in which they were operating and in which the treaty was drawn up has changed totally. We can now see clearly that we have not a one-speed Europe, nor even a two-speed Europe, but a three or four-speed Europe, with some countries right outside the exchange rate mechanism—including this country, which is coming through the recession—some countries with so-called hard currencies, such as Germany, Belgium and Holland, with Switzerland and Austria outside the Community, and with France hanging on by its eyebrows—those countries are being dragged into the depths of the recession—and other countries that have already had to retreat somewhat within the ERM, such as Spain and Portugal, with Italy now right outside it.

We have a three-speed Europe, within no convergence of any kind taking place. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said, far from seeing convergence, we are seeing divergence. Not a single country's deficit, or debt as a proportion of GDP, conforms in any way with the Maastricht criteria, and those factors conform less as time goes by. That brings home the fact that the Maastricht architects' high hopes for European monetary union have proved totally impracticable. I do not know of any responsible banker with real insight and wisdom in the whole of Europe who now believes that the proposals and timetable for monetary union in the text of the Maastricht treaty are realistic or will be fulfilled.

Worse than that, the existence of the dream of a single currency—a single currency is not at all necessary for a common market, and those who say otherwise are wrong—has turned the ERM and monetary co-operation in Europe into what has seemed like a stepping-stone or glide path to monetary union and the single currency, and that undermines sensible, practical monetary co-operation in Europe. We shall have to return to that sensible, practical co-operation when we have got rid of the fantasy of moving towards a single money and a single monetary policy for the whole of Europe from Lisbon to Berlin, and from Palermo to Glasgow. That is all nonsense, and it is undermining both the single market and the hopes of monetary co-operation in an extremely volatile world.

The context has changed totally in that sense, and it has also changed, as my hon. Friends have reminded the House this afternoon, in the sense that we now have a very high-cost Europe. Even Jacques Delors appears to be in something of a panic as he orders special inquiries to be made into why Europe is pricing itself out of jobs and ruining its competitive structure. Those developments are moving rapidly.

Can we compete, or can Germany compete, with Taiwan and Asia? Not only are labour unit costs in Hong

Kong one third of ours, but up the Pearl river from Guangdong province, people are producing not shoddy but high-quality goods at one tenth the labour costs of Hong Kong. To come nearer to home, to eastern Europe, some people say that Poland needs help. However, Polish exports need less and less help. They are extremely high-quality goods and very competitive. Those are the places with which we shall have to compete.

As the more perceptive Opposition Members know, that underlines the absurdity of arguing that we should hold on to the social chapter doctrine at a time when the main need of the European powers, led by the Germans, is somehow to get out from under the whole idea of massive social overheads and uncompetitive labour costs that is undermining the prospect of European growth and employment. That has all changed, and I am glad that my party is on the right wavelength, although the Labour party is on the wrong wavelength.

The priorities with regard to eastern Europe have changed, too. We have completely new, desperately important tasks. We must bring the Visegrad countries into democracy, which they will not achieve otherwise, and we must make some sense of the chaos and disaster that we have made of the Bosnian situation. Europe did the most irresponsible thing that a human being can do; it brought a child—a new state—into the world and then refused to accept responsibility for it or to do anything to prevent it from being torn into little bits, as is now happening.

Finally, enlargement will take place. There seems to be an illusion that that will not totally change the structure of the Community. The four new countries will make the total 16, with 11 small states and five big ones. There will be 21 Commissioners and a vast new range of Members of the European Parliament. Sixteen people will be sitting round a table designed for six, and there will be 72 language combinations. That will totally change the way in which the Community works. The Maastricht treaty is only a stopping point, an interim measure before we have to move towards totally new procedures and structures, for which a new treaty will be required.

We should now focus on the design for a decentralised Community, and for that we need more accountability. I dislike phraseology about decisions being brought closer to the people. It contains the patronising implication that power somehow comes from above, when it does not. Power goes upwards.

We must make subsidiarity a political procedure. Everyone recognises that it is not a legal but a political procedure. This House will have a vital role to play in ensuring that it is made a political procedure, with our having a say early on in the pre-legislative process. We do heroic work scrutinising the legislation as it comes down from Brussels. But we must get in earlier in the process and ensure that we have an opportunity, pre the legislation, to test whether they are matters about which the Community should be legislating. That is the only way to make subsidiarity work.

An enormous amount of work remains to do done. The Third Reading of the Bill will enable us to put immediate matters behind us—we do not know what is to come—and ensure that we begin focusing on the task of the 1990s to create the kind of Europe we want. Let us be realistic and accept that on the last occasion over Maastricht, Britain was on the defensive from the start. We lost the initiative over the intergovernmental conference and even when we got to Maastricht, although we achieved some heroic exemptions.

If we have confidence, the opportunity exists—if we are not in the mood to cop out and opt out—to seize the initiative in the shaping of the Europe for which there will be another treaty in 1996 and about which the review must begin now. On the last occasion we were on the defensive. If we show initiative now, we can win the race.

7.11pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) made an important observation when he said that the official Labour party and the trade union movement have at last accepted Europe and the European Community. That is clear and he was right to make the point. Indeed, it is one of the clear impressions to be gained from the debates in Committee and on Report.

There is today at the heart of British economic policy a grand coalition. The occupants of the Labour Front Bench as well as the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and the nationalist parties are junior members of that coalition. But members they are, and I have no doubt that my right hon. Friends hope that, after the next election, they will be senior members of that coalition. Either way, the coalition will remain, and for the first time since the last war—perhaps in the pre-war era we had a kind of coalition for a short time over the gold standard—we have a fundamental and grand coalition on economic policy.

I also get the impression from the debates in Committee that Ministers have been operating under a delusion, and I say that with particular respect to the Foreign Secretary, who was rather more defensive today. Otherwise, he and other members of the Government have been operating under the delusion that they gained a great victory at Maastricht. They seem to think that they saved the nation state—that they rolled back the frontiers of federalism, challenged centralising tendencies and so enabled the nation state to live again.

I do not see Maastricht as a federal treaty, whether or not the word "federal" appears in it. Federalism implies democracy and I see little concern for democracy in the Maastricht treaty. Indeed, the European political class and the bureaucracy that follows it around is not that interested in democracy.

If one compares the European political class with the American political class, for instance, one detects a totally different attitude towards a fundamental belief in democracy. The European political class wants European integration without democracy. It wants to play with and enjoy the flummeries of the nation state and still transfer the power of the nation state to the central institutions with which it feels it can deal and to which it can have almost sole and unrestricted access.

So what we have from the Maastricht treaty is a Europe of institutions—a directoire of institutions—and of three in particular. They are the court, the Commission and a new institution, which will be the European central bank. The court gets more power. There are more words, there is another treaty and the court becomes more powerful. Should there ever be an ambiguity, absurdity or lack of clarity in the treaty, the court will interpret the relevant words and phrases in accordance with an ever closer

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

union. That has been the case in the past and it is bound to happen again, in the same way as the federal court in the United States has performed precisely that task.

The Commission gains power. The Financial Secretary said during the passage of the Bill that the Commission had always had a general oversight over the the economic policies of member states. But under the Maastricht treaty it gets more than an oversight. Its gets power over the economic policies of member states. The Commission is the institution in the driving seat on the journey towards economic union. The bank is in the driving seat on the journey towards monetary union, which is what the bank is all about.

As I say, we have a directoire of institutions which are ultimately responsible only to themselves, to the treaty and to the words. The three institutions are custodians of the word and, at the end of the day, the word is supreme in the whole set-up. We have been told that in 1996 there will be another intergovernmental conference. According to the treaty, that conference is supposed to make more efficient the institutions of the Community. The result will be more powers for the court, the Commission and the bank.

The British Government believe that somehow, if we bring in five more countries, the centralising progress and power of the Community will be lessened. In fact, the opposite will be the case. Five more countries joining the Council of Ministers will result in an even greater dilution of that democratic arm. Imagine the result with five more countries in the European Parliament. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) referred to 78 varieties of language. There will be an assemblage of Babel in the European Parliament.

The imperial civil service—the directoire, the three main institutions to which I referred—will become even more powerful. Politicians will come and go and they will not be able to understand each other without the necessary translating equipment. The translations will be terrible and they will have to return to their member states to clarify matters.

With all that going on, the imperial civil service will be in place. It will be there, just as it was in place when it governed India under British rule, as it governed the Austro-Hungarian empire and as the Soviet Communist party governed the Soviet empire. Those developments will strengthen, not weaken, the centralising tendencies of those concerned and of the institutions, all totally undemocratic, of the European union.

I fear that that will lead rapidly towards a common defence and foreign policy. The events in Bosnia and the rift with the United States reveal that the French and those who have argued against NATO have already won the intellectual argument and will move quickly towards a common European defence and common policy, with all its implications for the control of nuclear weapons and so on. There will then be a drive towards economic and monetary union and a single currency.

I do not accept the claim that all that cannot and will not happen. There will be such a drive because the single market is failing. About 17·5 million people are unemployed. Only 60 per cent. of the people of western Europe who are capable of working are at work. About 40 per cent. are economically inactive. In the United States, the figure is 30 per cent. and in Japan it is 25 per cent.

As I say, the single market is not working. It is said that it would work if we had a single currency. It is claimed that that is the catalyst we need to make it all come together. I do not believe that it can work. The over-centralised, undemocratic, institutional nature of the Community after Maastricht cannot make Europe competitive with the United States or Japan or make it competitive with what is happening elsewhere in the world, including some of the Asian countries. We are creating a structure that militates against growth and technological development; it merely creates unemployment.

Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are somewhat confused about a single or common currency. I believe that they agree with it. They also believe that monetary union is possible without monetary convergence. Apparently, with real convergence everything will work—but to have monetary union there must first be monetary convergence. Perhaps they believe that convergence will not be painful, but it will be extremely painful. The only way in which we can arrive at the sort of monetary union required in the treaty is by means of a sharp monetary convergence, as foreseen by those who drafted the treaty.

Those of us who have argued against the treaty have been portrayed as sceptics, as fuddy-duddies and as old-fashioned thinkers, by contrast with the modernists, who are in favour of centralising, undemocratic and inflexible institutions. I am not quite sure now who are the modernists and who are the ancien regime. I am beginning to think that those in favour of the treaty are arguing for an ancien regime that will not work. Perhaps we are the modernists and perhaps history will prove us right.

7.20 pm

Mr. Peter Butler (Milton Keynes, North-East): I am enormously grateful finally to have caught someone's eye to make my maiden speech. I know that the House will afford me the usual courtesies for such an occasion. If I appear to be reading the speech, that is simply because I am. I should like to pay tribute to the taxi driver—anonymous—in whose taxi I left the speech this afternoon and who took the trouble to return it to the House.

It has long been my intention to speak on Third Reading of this Bill, but, optimistically, I had expected that to be some months ago. As the very last of the 1992 intake to speak, I congratulate all my colleagues on their speeches. The pride with which they were delivered was matched by a universal determination to make a better world for the generations that will follow us. The friendship and informed debate exhibited on both sides of the House make it possible to believe that that is achievable.

I intend to follow the traditional form of maiden speech before returning to the importance of the Bill to my constituency. That constituency is the only new and additional seat in this Parliament. Originally it was part of Buckingham and represented by that great socialist, Robert Maxwell—thought then to be the epitome of the modern British Labour party. His name still appears on the boarded-up factories in my constituency, which he bought and then closed down.

Inexplicably, he lost in 1970, and for 22 years Bill Benyon represented what became the Milton Keynes constituency. He did so with a courtesy, charm and effectiveness which endeared him to his constituents and a clear sense of duty and principle which endeared him at

times to the leadership of his party. He never lost his belief in the future of the new city of Milton Keynes and its success is due in large part to his unstinting efforts, to which I now pay tribute. That tribute was echoed by the Boundary Commission, which found it necessary to create two seats so that two Conservative Members could succeed him.

In Milton Keynes, we boast by far the best built environment in the kingdom. We have more footpaths and bridleways than any other city, 7 million trees and almost as many roundabouts. We also have some concrete cows. But above all we boast of our people. We are a young and purposeful community which cares for its environment, which looks after its elderly and disadvantaged and which demonstrates best practice in many fields of endeavour. We build and plan better, we look after the environment better, we recycle what we can, and we work hard and live well.

Milton Keynes is an harmonious multicultural city with a "can-do" approach to life and business. We prove day after day that new can be good, that enterprise can succeed and that commerce and a caring society can be mutually compatible. Our city motto, by which we live, reads, "By knowledge, design and understanding".

My constituency includes a large part of rural North Buckinghamshire, with towns and villages which previous generations would still recognise. The Romans started a massive road improvement scheme in the early fourth century to encourage commercial activity in Britain. In my constituency, I am pleased to say, that programme is now nearing completion, with the widening of the M1 motorway. Perhaps the most astonishing continuity arises from the placing of the modern borough council offices —I believe by chance—just 100 yards from the old Saxon mound where the village moots, the earliest form of local government, were held. One thousand years of local people being involved in governing themselves is a proud record.

In those days a moot was what we would term an enabling authority. It employed no one at all. Meetings were undoubtedly shorter, but I feel certain that moots must even then have been under Conservative control—as the county of Buckinghamshire remains, uniquely, today. In 1992, Her Majesty the Queen attended the opening of a new ecumenical city church in the constituency and heard, for the first time since the reformation, both Archbishop and Cardinal preach. That was a powerful statement of belief and a welcome to a future of which we in Milton Keynes are not afraid.

To return to today's debate: it will decide whether the country joins Milton Keynes in welcoming the future. I shall try to maintain the tradition of non-contentious maiden speeches. From the vigorous and confident base that I have described, we look outwards to a hostile and dangerous world. Europe is a geographical area and a political conceit, but it is not a monastic retreat cutting us off from uncomfortable truths. As a trading nation we must know that we do not live or compete in Europe: we compete in the world. I have chosen to make my speech today because I believe that we should pause and consider before we vote on the Third Reading of the Maastricht Bill.

Those of us who have listened quietly to the views on each side and who have voted to accept rather than to welcome the treaty have surely earned the right to issue a caution. The sovereignty of our people comes down from history. This country was not invented a century or two ago to settle some long-forgotten imperial argument. Our constitution was not thought up by any invader, or imposed by international tribunal, or by the force of recent insurrection—nor are we accustomed to seeing it torn up and redrawn. My constituents have entrusted me with their sovereignty; in return, I have supported my Government. If history judges us to have been wrong on this issue, and if the statement that we are citizens only of Europe should turn out to have some legal meaning after all, we shall have destroyed what was not ours to destroy, and given away what we did not own but held only in trust.

We live in a time of historic change. Socialism has collapsed, in Russia and elsewhere, and it does not look too healthy on the Labour Benches. That collapse has spawned desperate conditions for millions, now visible to us for the first time. War and starvation are widespread and not just where the television cameras go. Europeans are killing each other even as we speak.

Through this wasteland of dead beliefs and decaying institutions, it is our duty to force a passage for our country. We can adapt geography to politics and call ourselves Europeans temporarily, but Britain predates and will outlive the idea of a politically united Europe. So what touchstones can we employ? Surely our history and special personality answer that. Wherever we have looked to our own national interest, tolerant of other ideas but ultimately confident in our own identity, we have been successful, based on that tolerance and on the energetic Christian morality of our people.

Milton Keynes attracts investment from overseas, with 271 foreign-based companies choosing it because of the quality of our people, our communications and our lifestyle. We have welcomed 47 Japanese, 98 north American and 125 European companies. This inward investment is recognition that Milton Keynes is a quality place to do business, but it would not attract a single investor without the background of this Government's policies and our place in Europe.

I am not prepared to vote today to tell the employers in my constituency that the United Kingdom is closing its doors on international business and on the challenges and opportunities of the future.

I have heard too much about why we need Europe and perhaps too little about why Europe needs us. I believe that it does. Indeed, every true European visionary thinker has started from the basis that Europe cannot succeed without the United Kingdom. Without us, Europe would be incomplete and could never begin to fulfil its true potential.

We have a duty to use our particular genius to act as the dynamo for the development of a free trade, tolerant society of independent nation states co-operating to take our people into the next century. I have no doubt that our national interests and the interests of my constituents are best served by extending our influence in Europe while maintaining our separate role in the world.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently asked for principled support for the Bill. I hope that I have indicated that. Others today will no doubt supply abstentions, principled or otherwise.

I thank the House for its courtesy. If it wishes to extend a similar courtesy to me on another occasion I shall accept. I sit down with a relief which I am confident will be matched by all those who have been kind enough to listen to me today.

7.30 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): That was a vintage maiden speech, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on it. They say good wine is better for waiting to taste it, and that was certainly true in his case. We look forward to other occasions when we will have a similar opportunity.

We support the Bill; we supported it on Second Reading and for most of the time during its passage through the House. We have had a couple of reservations about it, but we want it on the statute book and we will be voting for it tonight.

Plaid Cymru Members have been the most consistent of all parties in the House of Commons in our pro-Europe stand. We welcome the implementation of the Maastricht treaty, but we regret that the social chapter will not apply initially to the United Kingdom. I say "initially" because I am convinced that in the fullness of time, and perhaps sooner than many hon. Members believe, it will be necessary for the United Kingdom to accept the social chapter.

I do not believe that it is possible to apply a single market on a fair basis if 11 countries have regard to minimal rights for workers and one tries to gain a competitive advantage by avoiding such responsibilities. I believe that we are in a transient position and that the sooner we accept the social chapter the better it will be for the working people of these islands.

As hon. Members have mentioned, the Third Reading will facilitate a further debate on the social chapter under the provisions of clause 7. Therefore, I find it difficult to understand the attitude of some Opposition Members who are not prepared to support the Bill and will be abstaining on Third Reading. If we do not get the Bill through, the social chapter will not be available for anyone, either here or in the rest of Europe, because we will begin negotiating some new treaty.

I respect the position of those hon. Members who have been opposed all along to the Bill, but I do not understand the mainstream within the Labour party who have said that they support Europe, have often voted with the most reactionary part of the Conservative party and are now making a principled stand of abstention on Third Reading.

I support the Bill because of the importance of the European dimension for the future of my country. Wales is a European nation. We are a Celtic people. Our language, culture, religion and traditions are all rooted in Europe. Our civilisation is a European one. Wales is an historic nation and a European region, and the new Europe is the positive context within which we believe our identity can flourish in the 21st century.

The treaty is also important in economic terms. To a large extent, the regeneration of the Welsh economy has been built on inward investment. Companies such as Sony, Bosch in Glamorgan and Euro-DPC in my constituency come to Wales because we are part of a European market and the European Community. If we were not, those companies would not be coming to Wales now. Companies considering investing there are holding back because of the uncertainty of our position. The well-being of Wales requires us to be a full, integral and enthusiastic part of the European Community, so, for economic reasons, it is necessary for us to be there.

In terms of the development of Government institutions, it is important for Wales that the treaty makes progress. The political structures of the United Kingdom are obsolete and more decisions are being taken on an European level. The agriculture policy that affects my constituents is being determined in Europe, as are decisions influencing industry and commerce. Decisions on the nature of the unitary markets that are taking over are being taken by the EC, and environmental policies, where one country's industry causes another country's pollution, must be co-ordinated on a European level.

European Standing Committee B on which I serve demonstrates the significance of the growing European dimension for the workload of the House. We need structures that recognise that some decisions can, must and shall be taken on a European level. At the same time, some decisions that are taken here could be taken by the people they affect.

Wales needs direct, strong links to the European Community. There is one tentative step in that direction in the Bill—the creation of the Committee of the Regions. That is a small step in the right direction. I hope that the Committee of the Regions will grow into the second chamber of the European Parliament, a decentralist chamber providing a counterbalance to the centralising tendency that is inevitably part of any first chamber. That would be analogous to the model in Germany today.

It is important that Wales gets three or four seats out of the United Kingdom representation on the Committee of the Regions. We need democratic representatives. There has to be respect for pluralist nature of Welsh politics and it is essential that there is a reporting-back mechanism, that we do not send local councillors to that committee, sitting next to the ex-Prime Minister of Bavaria, without a strong regional base to give those representatives the credibility they need to argue the case.

The Government must let us know quickly about the provisions for setting up the representation on the Committee of the Regions. When the treaty is ratified, nothing will happen on a European level without the Committee of the Regions, because its opinion will be needed even if it does not have a veto.

For Wales to have a real link with European institutions we need more than a couple of councillors on the Committee of the Regions and occasional influence on the Council of Ministers through the Welsh Office. We need links from our own Parliament and representatives on European institutions in our own right. We need to ensure we have the same strength of voice and the same clout as other small nations such as Denmark and Ireland, and Catalonia, or regions such as Bavaria.

The Council of Ministers must change, and there has been talk tonight of another treaty. As Europe develops and other nations come in, inevitably the mechanism of the Council of Ministers must change. I realise that Wales is only a small country and that the mechanism by which small countries get an entree into the decision-taking process must be different from the way it has developed over the past 20 or 30 years. We will miss out if we have no links whatsoever.

The discussions over recent months about subsidiarity have been important, but we must recall that subsidiarity is not just an argument about the relationships between London and Brussels, Paris and Brussels and Rome and Brussels. If it means anything, subsidiarity is about authority, about sovereignty growing from the bottom up, and that can be aggregated on a Welsh level, a Scottish level and an English regional level, as well as a European

level. In other words, subsidiarity must be about taking decisions at the appropriate level and as close as possible to the people that they affect.

The treaty is important in terms of creating a united continent. The basis of the original EEC was to avoid France and Germany ever again going to war in the way they have twice this century, at a cost to all of us in Europe. People say that could never happen again, but we need only to look at Bosnia and Yugoslavia to see that it could happen again. As a basis for peace, we need to safeguard a united Europe, built around the structures that we have developed over recent years.

If we want other nations to join—the Scandinavian countries, Austria and eventually the eastern European countries—that structure must be based on maintaining the peace that is so essential. The Father of the House spoke of the need for us to make friends, and that must be a central consideration. The treaty is a step on that road. It is a step towards getting the sort of structure that can give the small, historic nations and small regions of Europe a direct voice within the decision-taking mechanisms. For that reason, we shall support Third Reading.

7.40 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on a superb maiden speech and one with which I am happy to express general agreement, although I may be going a bit further when I walk into the no Lobby against the Government, with no fear of the Prime Minister, this time, having any reason to ask me to change sides at the last second.

Watching the television version of Robert Bolt's "A Man for All Seasons" at the weekend, I was reminded of a comment that is true under all political regimes, and not just that in the reign of King Henry VIII—that to be different from everyone else is not easy. Sir Thomas More, a former Speaker and then Lord Chancellor, was talking to his son-in-law, Roper, who replied, "To be different is not necessarily to be right." Who is different and who is right about the Maastricht treaty is a good question.

As one of the so-called Euro-sceptics who will be voting against Third Reading, I am in the Sir Thomas More tendency of being different from the majority in the Chamber. That does not necessarily mean that I am right, but then the Government are different from the majority of the citizens of the United Kingdom in wanting the treaty ratified. The fact that the Government and their supporters are a minority on the issue does not make them necessarily right, either. The fact that the United Kingdom Government, alone in the European Community, promote the Maastricht treaty as a decentralisation agreement—a significant check on federalism—does not make them necessarily right in that interpretation, either.

One searches in vain, except perhaps in Denmark, for anyone, other than my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, who really thinks that Maastricht is anything other than a move towards closer integration for the European Community. The Belgian Prime Minister, to whom my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has referred, dismissed that view, and he is the man who will be presiding over the Council of Ministers for the next six months from June. He made clear his commitment to using the Maastricht treaty as a stepping stone to a more federal Europe. That approach was endorsed by the Luxembourg Foreign Minister and by Ruud Lubbers, the former Dutch Foreign Minister, who recently landed himself the well-paid job of European Commissioner for External Affairs.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is a veritable Sir Thomas More in being in a minority among the European Heads of Governments in imagining that he has achieved a decentralising, anti-federalist Europe agreement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has never been under any illusions about that; nor has he ever sought to obscure his objectives for the European Community and our country's position within it. He made that crystal clear in a fine speech today.

While I disagree profoundly with my right hon. Friend's view, I respect the sincerity and honesty with which he has always expressed it and I do not call into question his patriotism or that of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench and elsewhere who want to submerge the United Kingdom within a closely integrated European Community, eventually having all the trappings of a unified state such as a common currency—a subject on which my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup dilated again—and centralised control of financial and taxation policies throughout the member states.

It is to my right hon. Friend's shame that he appears unable to extend the same respect to those who disagree with him. At the weekend, he was heard to utter an extraordinary judgment on those of us who have a genuine concern about the Bill and the treaty that it is intended to implement. I heard him say on the radio, and it was repeated the next day in the *Daily Mail*,

"These people—

meaning those of us opposed to Maastricht—

are going to be hated for all time. Think what they have done to our party."

No hon. Member knows more about being hated than my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. He also said, as many Conservative Members have so often said, that we fought the general election on a manifesto that included the Maastricht treaty as central to our policies, and we have no business voting against it now. He even said that we had not stated our objections at the general election.

Long before the general election, and during the campaign, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder) who represents the constituency neighbouring mine, will know—I am delighted to see him here in the guise of Chief Whip, and I am moderating some of the nasty things that I have said because I need his friendship—I made it clear that I could not vote for the Maastricht treaty until the British people had been consulted in a referendum.

In 1987, in common with my right hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Norfolk, for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and for Old Bexley and Sidcup, I had in my election manifesto a commitment to replace the household rating system, a property-based tax, with a flat-rate community charge. That pledge was carried when we passed the Local Government (Finance) Act 1988. That did not stop the Conservative Government going back on the manifesto pledge and bringing in, through the council tax, a

[Mr. Michael Carttiss]

property-based tax to help finance local government. That was the complete opposite of the pledge on which they fought the 1987 general election.

How dare those people say to me—I have been consistent on the issue—that I am not fulfilling my obligations to my electorate when I continue to warn them that the Maastricht treaty is not all it is cracked up to be? Everybody else in Europe can see that, but not those on the two Front Benches.

Those on the Opposition Front Bench have failed to fulfil their constitutional responsibility to oppose the Government. What a fiddle-faddle—I cannot think of the right word—what a load of nonsense—a rude word has come into my mind, one that we use in Norfolk, but that would not be appropriate in the House.

The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that we should have a referendum on the system of voting for Members of Parliament, but he does not believe that we should have a referendum on a fundamental change in our constitutional position, as a Parliament, vis-a-vis the European Parliament. It will not matter two hoots in five years' time how we elect Members to this Parliament, because we shall give away most of the powers that they have had in Milton Keynes and Great Yarmouth for centuries. One might just as well ask the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup to appoint all of us, as he used to do when he was leader of the Conservative party so as to ensure that only those who took his view ever got selected in the first place.

Watching the clock, and being conscious of the fact that I must finish by the end of my 10 minutes, I want to draw attention to a small example of how we have been misled, when the people of other European countries have not been misled. An article in *The House Magazine* quoted Karel De Gucht—I am not very good at pronouncing his name, but nobody pronounces mine properly so it does not matter. He was reported as pointing out:

"after the Maastricht Treaty has been ratified the parliament"—

that is, the European Parliament—

"will be a genuine legislative body."

He commented:

"Maybe it is helpful for this government to get the treaty through if they don't tell this to the people."

The Government have refused to tell the people. We should have a referendum and I urge the House of Lords to give us that opportunity. The other place will not be taking a constitutional decision, but it could give us the opportunity to think again. The function of the House of Lords is to let this great place come to a second decision, to reconsider the need for a referendum that will let the people of Britain decide on their future.

7.50 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): This disastrous Bill is based on a treaty which can only do immense harm to Britain and the other countries of the Community. Even if the treaty did not contain the most rigid monetarist policies, I would remain totally opposed to it. My hon. Friends who are in favour of the treaty vote on every occasion against the monetarist policies of the Government, but they hide from themselves what I shall later describe in detail—the monetarist policies that will undoubtedly cause tremendous suffering to many people in our country.

However much I oppose the policies of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), I have some admiration for him over this matter. The hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) spoke about the right hon. Gentleman's foolish remarks on Sunday about Tory critics, but at least I admire the fact that he makes no secret of his desire for a federalist, centralist Europe and, moreover, that he sees the treaty as a basis for that. However, I cannot admire those Ministers who pretend that the treaty has no such significance. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup makes his views absolutely clear at every opportunity and looks upon the United States as a federal model for Europe. I wish that Ministers were as frank about the matter as the right hon. Gentleman.

The treaty is quite clear. It provides for economic and monetary union, although I accept that that will not happen immediately, a single currency, and a common defence and foreign policy—all of that leading in time to a single state. Euro-enthusiasts who believe that such a Europe is desirable will vote for the treaty. The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), who is nodding, holds that view, but those who do not share his enthusiasm are, I believe, in the majority.

At 10 o'clock there will be a large majority for Third Reading, and that majority will be made even bigger by the fact that my party intends to abstain. However, that vote will not accurately and fairly reflect the views of the House. If there was a free vote the treaty might still receive a majority, but it would be narrow and it is likely that the Bill would be defeated. Therefore, I do not see the vote at 10 o'clock as reflecting the House's view on the treaty. It is unfortunate that there will not be a free vote.

The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) made a good maiden speech, and like him I do not think that we have any mandate to give up large chunks of economic and political sovereignty to the European central bank and other Community institutions. We were not elected to do that. The Government say that the treaty was mentioned at the last election, but the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who is critical of the measure and of many other aspects of the European Community, said that in his borough his colleague here who represents a different view entirely got the same percentage of the vote. Therefore, how can it be argued that at the last election any of us received a mandate to give up so much of our economic and political sovereignty?

There will not be a referendum, but not for all the reasons that have been given by Front-Bench spokesmen. It will be because there is a feeling, I hope justified, that it would not produce a majority in favour of the treaty. That is why Britain, unlike other countries such as Denmark, will not have a referendum.

I do not challenge the fact that in future the House will be able to debate, as it has debated over the centuries, all the issues. The difference will be that crucial decisions for our country will no longer be taken in the House but elsewhere. Those who think that that is desirable may see it as another reason for supporting the treaty.

When debating this measure I am reminded of how, at the very end of the 18th century, the then Irish House of Commons voted for union with Britain. Every sort of

bribe and promise was used to get a majority of 46 for the measure. A leading opponent of the union, Henry Gratton, said at the time:

"The constitution may, for a time, be lost, the character of the country cannot be so lost."

How right he proved to be, and how disastrous that union was.

The fight for Britain to retain its national sovereignty will continue, irrespective of tonight's majority and the passing of the Bill by the Lords. Those of us who hold the view that I have expressed will not give up our belief that the House has a right, a duty and an obligation to the people to carry on as we have done throughout the centuries to ensure that the important and crucial decisions affecting our country are taken in this House.

Like our predecessors on the Opposition Benches, I have always passionately believed that countries governed by Britain should have their independence. I argued for that and our predecessors argued for it even more strongly. That attitude was unpopular and at times Conservative Members accused Labour Members of speaking for every country but our own. If, like our Opposition predecessors, I believe so strongly and passionately that other countries should have had their national independence, how can I take any other view about my own country? We should retain our important national independence.

It is not only a question of national sovereignty because article 104C of the treaty, for example, sets out the monetarist policies that I have mentioned. Governments will be expected to comply with measures such as a deficit of no more than 3 per cent. of GDP. That percentage is contained in a protocol. Bearing in mind the present deficit, reaching that 3 per cent. would mean a cut in public spending of about £33 billion—virtually the amount that is currently being spent on the national health service. What possible justification could there be for pursuing such a policy?

A Conservative Government use every excuse to cut public spending. They do not need excuses, but would use the treaty by saying that they were trying to achieve convergence. A Labour Government, moreover, would be imprisoned by such policies. When they wanted to promote employment and training and spend money on our welfare services, they would be told time and again that they could not do so, that there was a limit in the treaty to the deficit. They would have to go to Brussels to explain, justify and grovel.

Do those of my hon. Friends who favour the treaty want such measures? That is why, apart from anything else, the treaty is wrong. It is deflationary. The Community has 17 million unemployed. Does anyone imagine that the treaty will deal with the problem? It can only make it worse. It embodies all the rigid, monetarist, deflationary policies which are so wrong and which the Labour party has opposed on so many occasions.

The treaty is disastrous. I find it difficult to understand how the Labour shadow Cabinet decided that our party should abstain tonight. We should vote against the Bill. I hope that at 10 o'clock, together with those Conservative Members who oppose the treaty, there will be many Labour Members in the "No" Lobby. However small the minority, it will more greatly reflect the opinion of the country than the majority that the Government will undoubtedly achieve.

8 pm

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): I join in the congratulations that have been heaped upon my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler), who has now left the Chamber to take some well-deserved refreshment. He made a charming, witting and most informative maiden speech. He began by almost teasing himself for having left it for so long. He has shown that that is our loss, not his. Of course, there was once a newly elected Member called Margaret Thatcher who took 18 months to make her maiden speech—after that she never stopped. Whether or not my hon. Friend follows in her footsteps, he will be able to look back with some pride on his maiden speech tonight.

I have always been a strong advocate of our membership of the European Community. I was a founder member of the Conservative Group for Europe. I warmly supported my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) when he took us into the Common Market, as it was then called. During the referendum I campaigned vigorously for a yes vote. I supported the Single European Act. Indeed, I have no regrets.

However, I cannot accept the Maastricht treaty, or the Bill that would give it effect in our domestic law. Support for the single market and for joint action on such shared concerns as protection of the environment is one thing; support for the centralising tendencies and loss of democratic control embodied in this Bill is quite another. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spells out his view of the sort of Europe that he wants, I have no difficulty agreeing with him. The problem comes when I try to match those worthy ambitions with the contents of the treaty. I am afraid that the two do not match.

I listened to most of the debates during the Committee stage of the Bill, and what a revelation they were. The concept of subsidiarity has not lived up to the claims made for it and it still has no precise legal definition. The dice are loaded against any member state taking a case to the European Court when it is in dispute with the Commission over the application of subsidiarity. We heard all the arguments, and there will be more, about the social chapter, yet it has been shown that our voluntary exclusion can be got round by other means by a majority of member states—possibly by using articles 1 and 2 in conjunction with article 118a of the treaty of Rome.

Whether or not they want it, we are conferring on the Queen's subjects a European citizenship with rights and duties, yet no one has been able to say precisely what those rights and duties will be. We have the opportunity to opt out of a single currency, but I foresee that when we come to make that decision we will be subjected to exactly the same arguments as those which we have heared during our debates on the Bill.

I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, in whatever capacity he might then hold, will say that if we do not embrace a single currency international investment will flood away. We will be warned of the dangers of setting ourselves aside from other states in Europe. There is no opt-out from the obligations to achieve monetary union, in particular the obligations of stage 2, which begins next January. By slow degrees, the British people, through the British Parliament, will lose control of our economic policy.

[Sir George Gardiner]

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently made some comments, which I welcome, about our obligation to rejoin the ERM. I think that he is underestimating the pressure under which he will come from the rest of Europe for Britain to rejoin the ERM during stage 2.

With such far-reaching implications, the Government are most unwise—I put it no stronger—to proceed to ratification without granting any say to the British people. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup signed up Britain to the treaty of Rome, he at least believed—he had good cause for doing so—that he had the full-hearted consent of the British people. That was subsequently challenged by the Labour party and a referendum was held, which showed beyond any shadow of doubt that continued membership had our full-hearted consent.

I challenge any Minister to stand at the Dispatch Box and assert that the Government have the full-hearted consent of the British people to ratify the Maastricht treaty of union. They will not do that, because they cannot do it. It was never an issue in the general election and it has never been put to the British people. Ratification by the United Kingdom has no democratic legitimacy.

As the debate has proceeded, deep wounds have been inflicted on the unity of my party, both in the House and in the country. It has given me no joy to vote in the opposite Lobby to respected hon. Friends on what I judge to be an issue of principle. I very much hope that, after tonight, we can begin to heal the wounds. I have said previously that there must be life in the Tory party after Maastricht and we have many other important things to do.

However, for that to happen there must be mutual respect between those who have taken, and will continue to take, different views on a matter of such deeply held principle. There must be no talk of hatred for the rest of our lives. The argument over Maastricht will continue, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, until such time as ratification acquires some domestic legitimacy.

I fear for the future—not just for this country, but for the 12 nation states that are bound together in the Community—as democratic power is slowly shifted from national Parliaments to Community institutions. That shift of power will start next year when we enter stage 2 of monetary and, in consequence, political union. I can foresee the time when I, as a Member of Parliament, receive submissions from, for example, my local chamber of commerce. It will say, "Sir George, we believe that interest rates are too high for the efficient conduct of our business. Will you undertake to press the Chancellor to bring them down?" I will reply, "Yes, interest rates are too high, but I am afraid that there is nothing I can do to help you. You see, under the Maastricht treaty, power and decision over interest rates effectively lies with the unelected members of the European central bank."

"But surely," they will say "you can at least ask the Chancellor to press the case for British business." I will have to reply, "No, because even if I did, the Maastricht treaty prevents him from offering advice to those unelected bankers. They are cocooned against such advice and pressures. Nor is it any use going to your MEP, because he is not allowed to make representations on your behalf, either.

Then, I am sure, my constituents will look at me with incredulity and say, "But don't we live in a democracy? When were we consulted about whether we wanted to surrender this influence over our own future?" I shall have to say, "No, you weren't consulted. The powers have been signed away and we can never get them back." I have to warn the Government that when that comes to be generally recognised, the backlash will be terrible to behold.

I have three adult children and no grandchildren as yet, but when I have, never will they be able to come to me and say, "Grandpa, why did you vote to make the House of Commons irrelevant?" That is why I shall vote against the Bill.

8.10 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The House of Commons has a basic function to fulfil and that is not only to represent the views of the people who vote for us, but to tell those same people what is being done in their name by elected Governments.

I have been here a long time now and I have learnt to appreciate that, whatever the difficulties of this institution, it fulfils precisely that role. It is the link with the constituencies and the direct ability of our electorate to tell us their views which gives us our strength when we speak in the Chamber of the House of Commons. It is our commitment to protect their interest which gives us a legitimacy. Therefore, I shall vote against the Bill tonight because it is profoundly anti-democratic.

I have listened carefully throughout the debate. I have listened to those far more informed than I, including former Treasury Ministers such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), putting forward cast-iron arguments about the movement of control of our economy from Westminster to an unelected group of officials in Brussels.

I have listened to those who understand better perhaps than I do the finer points of constitutional law, and I have tried to understand how it can be that the House of Commons, which for so long has judged itself to be a protector of people's fundamental rights, has not somehow found it possible to convey to the people of the United Kingdom exactly what is being done in this Chamber and at this time, because it is such a wide-ranging change in our law.

Many people outside the Chamber do not understand constitutional law. Why should they? But they understand the connection between the gathering of taxes and the spending of taxes. That is so basic that they make their views known. It is frequently the basis on which they decide their votes in a general election. Yet here we are, as protectors of that fundamental right, being cheerfully prepared to hand it over without making it clear to the people who have put us here what we are doing.

One of the saddest things for me throughout the debate was to sit here and to regard our free press, noticeable by its absence, listening to Members of Parliament putting forward detailed arguments, knowing that they were, in effect, talking to a limited number of people.

We have been told by Ministers, even, I am sorry to say, by the Opposition Front Bench, "Don't worry about this legislation. It really isn't terribly important. After all, a lot of countries that signed up to the treaty didn't really mean

it. There has been a change in the Government. There has been a change in the economic situation. All will be well if you just have trust in letting the legislation go through."

I am not the youngest Member of this Parliament, and I am too long in the tooth to believe that any legislation should be allowed on to the statute book on the assumption that it will not count. Every bit of legislation counts. Legislation that takes powers from the House of Commons anywhere else counts more than any other.

After all, we are dealing with our economic control. How can members of my own party support loss of control over their own planning rights? How can those of us who care about the national health service, education, and housing, let decisions on those be taken by others elsewhere, over whom we have no control? "Don't worry," we are told in that pseudo-English that is the protector of those who wish to confuse rather than illuminate any argument, "we will correct the democratic deficit." By that they mean that they will transfer even more powers to even more people who will have the right to initiate legislation that we shall not have the right to correct.

The refusal of members of both Front Benches openly to debate the rights and wrongs of the legislation is, at the very best, unhelpful, and at worst, demeaning. There has been no correct exercise of our responsibility. Many women outside the Chamber say to me, "I don't know about politics." But they know what politics does to their families. They know what legislation means in terms of taxation, and they know that if they are taxed wrongly, if their views are not taken into account, and if the obvious legislators who should be voicing their opinions are not doing so, others will begin to take direct action. That is what I fear most.

The House of Commons developed because people believed that they had a right to say how their money should be spent, how their votes should be cast, how their Government should behave and how their future should be planned. I do not see anyone, on either Front Bench, telling my people in future, "You will be the citizen of a union—a union that you did not pick, a union that you were not asked about, a union to which you will have responsibilities that no one has even spelt out." To me, that is a most dangerous thing.

I do have grandchildren. I have six. They are being brought up to speak several languages and I find it sad, because language has always been my only facility—I had a father who said that I was frightened of stopping talking somewhere—to hear people in the House of Commons decide that those of us who oppose this legislation are little Englanders. With a Welsh father and a half-Irish and half-Norfolk mother, I find that description difficult to understand.

But I am a proud member of the United Kingdom, which is a free association of four different nations which work, live, argue, fight, support and are taxed and represented here within these islands. They are my concern. My party has served them ill and I shall vote tonight feeling firmly that the future of democracy is not served by those who impose political structures from above.

People decide what political structures they want, people create Parliaments, people demand rights and cast their votes, and we are tonight underplaying their interest and serving them very badly. I am ashamed of the role of the House of Commons.

8.19 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): The only notable contribution that I have made to the Maastricht debate so far was to support the Government in a crucial Division in my pyjamas. I could have remained downstairs in the ambulance and have been nodded through on that occasion in March, but I made that effort—which was quite painful—to demonstrate support for the achievements for Britain of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary at Maastricht and for their vision of the Europe of the future.

In common with my right hon. Friends, I want to see a decentralised, less bureaucratic and widening Community that will embrace EFTA and the new democracies, and a successful and expanding single market without a premature commitment to a single currency. I suspect that many of those who intend to vote against the Government tonight want the same—my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) confirmed that.

The judgment the House must make tonight is whether those objectives are more likely to be achieved with Britain remaining at the centre of the Community by ratifying the treaty or by Britain abandoning the principles of co-operation and compromise that brought us here tonight. I well understand the fears of some of my constituents at the possible consequences for Britain of the treaty. Much of its terminology is unfortunate; it is misleading; and it is certainly open to much misinterpretation. There are also fears that it is all irreversible if we sign.

There is nothing that the House cannot change if a majority of right hon. and hon. Members believe it to be in Britain's interest to do so—although I appreciate that not every right hon. and hon. Member will agree with that statement.

Much of the treaty is based on a bygone age. It was negotiated when the Soviet Union was in being, and agreed before the recession really hit Europe and the full consequences of German reunification were realised. It represented a negotiated compromise, but it has kept the Community together. Thanks to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the opt-outs that he achieved, for Britain the treaty is more symbolic than of substance.

We remain a leading and influential partner in the European Economic Community, and British business has been calling for that. My local Dorset chamber for industry and commerce regards that as essential for jobs and prosperity in our county. It wants an end to all remaining barriers to trade in the single market, with fairer competition. It wants the earliest-possible harmonisation of value added tax and duties.

In my constituency, tourism is the main provider of jobs. Hoteliers complain that VAT on tourism-related items in France and other Community countries is nearly three times lower than in Britain, and that is unfair competition for them. Off-licences, tobacconists and small corner shops complain that they will be put out of business by imports of duty-free goods from across the channel, and I hope that that situation will not continue to be ignored. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary is listening.

The principal reason that I want a ratified treaty to be put behind us is that we should seek with all possible speed a wider Europe, as opposed to a deeper, federal Community. As some of my hon. Friends know, I am greatly involved in bringing the new democracies into full

[Mr. David Atkinson]

membership of the Council of Europe, as chairman of its Committee for Relations with European Non-Member States. In Strasbourg last week, we welcomed the accession of Slovenia, Lithuania and Estonia, and we anticipate the membership next September of Romania and Latvia. We are currently considering the applications of nine more newly democratising countries.

My right hon. and noble Friend Lord Tebbit was exactly right in March to warn against a new iron curtain between the rich post-Maastricht Community and the poorer democracies. But where he is wrong is that successfully to accommodate the wider Europe without compromising all that the Community has achieved to date requires it to be kept together by ratifying Maastricht now.

Thanks to the initiatives of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister before and during the British presidency, that process is already under way, with negotiations with some EFTA countries and association agreements with some new democracies. I am particularly encouraged that talks have begun between the Community and Russia about a free trade zone. It will be a close-run thing as to whether the Russian federation follows the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Every one of the new democracies expects to join the European Community one day. For them, a Community in which Britain does not have a central role because it did not sign the treaty is inconceivable. It would be a disaster for them, as it would be for democracy, human rights, and all for which we stood alone against Hitler in 1940. Since the last war, five pan-European institutions have been established with different roles and differing memberships to encourage peace and co-operation. If we were to start from scratch today, probably the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe would be the only organisation closest to that required to promote security, trade, democracy and human rights throughout the continent.

Instead, the Maastricht treaty paves the way to greater unity and security with the Community as the core, and a common foreign and defence policy as the means—as Churchill and others foresaw—to guarantee peace in Europe. Without British membership and influence, that wider, more secure Europe is less likely to be achieved.

As none of my hon. Friends who oppose Maastricht has produced any credible constructive role for Britain, I have no hesitation supporting the Government tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We have about 40 minutes before the wind-up speeches. I make a plea for five minute contributions. Mr. George Howarth.

8.26 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): It is just a year since this process started, with the Second Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill to ratify the Maastricht treaty. I spoke on that occasion, but not at subsequent stages. As a result, I have much to say, but as I am conscious of the number of my hon. Friends who want to contribute, I shall be brief.

My problem with the treaty and with the Bill is that I consider myself to be pro-European, but honour-bound to oppose the treaty. If that sounds inconsistent, I shall explain why I hold those conflicting views. I believe that Britain's future is in Europe—there is no alternative, and I can conceive of no circumstances in which, in this day and age, we would want to withdraw from the Community. However, it does not necessarily follow that one must support the treaty because there is nothing to take its place. That was the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson).

All the strong arguments in favour of the treaty hinge on an enormous lapse of logic. Even the Foreign Secretary and the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee produced excellent examples of that today. They do not say, "This section of the treaty is so good, and the whole process of economic and monetary union is so sound, that you must support them." Instead, they say, "These things will never happen. They are all there in the treaty, but you must support it because there is nothing to take its place —but because those things will never happen, it will not hurt you to vote for the treaty."

I accept that it is not explicitly stated in the treaty that its purpose is to create a federal Europe. However, all the apparatus for that—or architecture, as the Foreign Secretary would probably more eloquently describe it—is present.

The Foreign Secretary would perhaps refer more elegantly to the architecture of a federal Europe. There is the whole drive towards economic and monetary union; there is the central bank; there is the move towards a single currency; and there is the attempt to recreate the institutions in a more federalist mode.

But we are told that these things will never happen. I find that a very difficult proposition to swallow. As a realist, however, I accept—with a heavy heart, as I am not one of the Labour party's natural rebels—that I must vote against the Third Reading. I accept that the current mathematics of the House of Commons means that the Bill will receive its Third Reading. Unlike other hon. Members, I do not think it likely that the measure will be significantly amended in another place. Indeed, any amendments at all are unlikely to originate there. Unless something inconceivable happens, the Bill is likely to end up on the statute book.

Given that, without the support of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself or of several Conservative Members, the measure will pass into law, there is an important function ahead for its opponents, especially my colleagues who will abstain tonight. Some of the central problems of Europe will have to be addressed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) referred to a document. I realise that several of my hon. Friends have not seen it, as it is going through a particular process. The document is about prosperity through co-operation and a new European future, and its headings sketch out the important features that must be considered—the extension of equality rights in a people's Europe, the lifting of the burden of the common agricultural policy, consumer rights, and democratisation of the Community. There is an excellent section about a wider Europe. Those are the issues that must be addressed.

This treaty is not the answer, but I hope that people —particularly members of my party—will ensure that the excellent objectives that we have set for ourselves will have flesh put on them. At present, there is a real fear that

Europe is moving in a direction that does not have the wholehearted support of its peoples. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, the backlash against such movement could be horrendous.

8.32 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): The only thing that this hour proves is that Privy Councillors are not always given the preference that other Members believe they receive.

Like many people, I am delighted that we have reached the Third Reading, and I hope that the Bill will be passed by the largest possible majority. The legislation sets out a formula by which the European Community can advance positively. Forty-five years ago, in the late spring of 1948, the first branch of United Europe was formed at Oxford. Among the people supporting that organisation with me were Peter Kirk, Sir Edward Boyle, Jeremy Thorpe and someone known as Richard de Taverne, better known to us as Dick Taverne, a previous Member for Lincoln.

I cannot understand the little Englanders, on either side of the House, who perceive Britain's playing little part in Europe but want and expect to be able to gain everything possible from the trading benefits that the European Community may provide. If they think that we shall benefit without playing our part, they might as well believe that Mitterand is a German in disguise.

As a member of the North Atlantic Assembly, I should be in Berlin at the moment. However, I remained here to speak and vote in this debate. As the treasurer of the new parliamentary assembly of the Conference on Co-operation and Security in Europe, I am in contact with many members of the parliaments of all the EC member states.

Those people—perhaps not the French and the Germans, though even the Germans to some extent—have often asked me why Britain is not playing a more major role in the European Community. They appreciate the role played and the leadership given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister while he was chairman of the Council of Ministers and at the Edinburgh summit. Perhaps those in Britain who criticise the Prime Minister's leadership should listen to the admiration expressed by members of the parliaments of other countries.

I want to speak about two financial matters and one other topic. It appears to me that there are merchants of gloom who reject the appeals and the statements of many people, especially the President of the Board of Trade, who clearly show that, with Britain playing its full part in the European Community, we shall be massively attractive from the point of view of enticing foreign investment to these shores.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lindsey, East (Sir P. Tapsell) has expressed the fear that Japanese investment could well be discouraged—even withdrawn—if we continue with Maastricht or let Maastricht overcome our thinking. My experience is exactly the opposite. As a director of an Anglo-Japanese company in this country, I have many Japanese connections here and in Japan. I can say absolutely that my entire experience of those people is that they are interested in Britain because Britain is playing a major role in Europe. *[Interruption.]* I do not mind what other people say, and I believe that people with first-rate experience in this field ought to be listened to.

Foreign investment here has other benefits. It brings business people, and often their families, on visits to this country; it encourages interest in British goods; it facilitates contacts which, if properly used, can stimulate trade abroad.

The Prime Minister is correct in his view that it will be impossible for us to rejoin the exchange rate mechanism unless its inadequacies are corrected. However, anyone who is associated with exporting or importing, with international commerce, must understand and advocate the benefit of knowing of the stability of exchange rates in the context of the currency in which he has to conduct his business. The exchange rate variations that we have seen over the past few years cannot necessarily be covered or insured against affordably.

To those who advocate complete freedom in the open market in foreign exchange I say carefully and concisely that they are friends of the international speculator. It is ethically wrong and morally indefensible that a few international speculators are able to make massive multi-fortunes at the expense of ruin for a nation's currency. That type of outmoded free market is indefensible, and we must find a way to limit it.

Is that possible? I believe that it is. The most entrepreneurial market in the world—the American stock exchange—has stop controls which ensure that, if the market moves more than 50 points in either direction, it closes down. That also applies to a number of the commodity markets. I urge the Government, particularly finance Ministers, to get together with G7—not just our European colleagues, as we need Japanese and American co-operation as well—to consider the structure of foreign currency rates, which should be reviewed to a much greater extent than they ever were in the ERM.

When that structure is set, should there be movement above a prescribed and agreed level the settlement date ought to be put back for between seven and 10 days. That would stop the speculators and short term-borrowing. It would go a very long way towards ensuring that foreign currency rate variations were avoided. It would also mean that the speculators would be unable to ruin a currency.

Subsidiarity—that ghastly word—will ensure that power is not passed to the Commission, but remains the absolute right of the member state. There will always be organisations and civil servants who wish more power to pass into their hands. That is why Maastricht is so important. It puts an end to that happening by slow absorption. The European Parliament will be given more control over the Commission than it has ever had before. It will take back certain powers that have been assumed by the Commission in Brussels.

I urge my right hon. Friends who will serve on the different ministerial Councils to guard against power slipping away to the Commission. Equally, Ministers must ensure that when European Commission regulations are promulgated by means of regulation in this country, there is no extension of those regulations, either for the sake of clarity or, even worse, because they have been hanging around Departments for a long time. We must watch that like a hawk.

Anybody who understands what has happened in the House ought not to hanker after a referendum. The referendum motion was defeated by a majority of 239. Hon. Members in all parts of the House voted against it. It is important to emphasise that point, so that the other place, an unelected Chamber, does not try to override that

[Sir Peter Emery]

very strong expression of opinion in the lower House. To do so would be absurd and would lead to further delay in signing the treaty.

The single market means that Europe will become a constructive federation of nation states, not a single state in itself. Britain will play a positive role in the centre of the European playing field. In years to come, the treaty will be seen as a treaty that ensures the future of Europe. It will also ensure that wars between European nations will never again be fought. It will mean that Europe has a better and more unified economic structure. A united Europe will then be able to play a major role in the history of the world.

8.42 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The public do not support the treaty. It is not demanded by the people. It is being imposed from the top down by an arrogant elite who are going too far and too fast down a road that most people do not want to go. It is being imposed by a grisly gang of old men, like Mitterrand and Kohl, who have lost support in their own countries and whose time is up. They are the men of yesterday, seeking to foist their outmoded and outdated straitjacket on Europe.

I had wanted to say something about economics, but I intend to obey your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from saying that the exchange rate mechanism, with its high interest rates, has pushed the whole of western Europe into recession. It has caused massive unemployment. At the moment, 20 million people are unemployed. There will be zero growth this year, which means that unemployment will rapidly rise to 30 million. That will be the effect on the whole of western Europe of the exchange rate mechanism.

If we are to make these major constitutional changes and set up a European union, of which we are all to become citizens, and if we are to transfer power over our economy to unelected bodies, which we cannot remove, including the autonomous central bank, it would be wrong and a grave constitutional impropriety and outrage to do so with no mandate and without the consent and agreement of the British people.

No one can say that the Government have explained to the British people what is envisaged or involved. The issue was not discussed at the recent election. The Bill is being pushed through a whipped House of Commons, with the important parts of the treaty having been debated in the dead of night while the nation slept and the media did not report. That is not only wrong but dangerous.

If we were to rejoin the ERM and conformed to the convergence criteria, which would lead to deflation, economic stagnation and even greater mass unemployment—which has already led to our constituents coming to us with their grievances—what should we say to them? We should have to tell them that their Parliament no longer had any powers over these matters, that those matters could no longer be affected by voting and that we, without consulting the voters, had given all these powers away when we passed the Maastricht Bill.

What would happen then? What would be the response and the reaction of the British people? Would it be in the least surprising if there were a growth of extremist movements? Democracy would be threatened and Parliament undermined. That is why it is dangerous to push the Bill through without consulting the voters.

Those who want the treaty and who want to make these changes would be wise to ask the electorate to share the responsibility, so that if things go wrong they can say to them, "You voted for it." It is in everybody's interest that, if this is to be done, it should be done only with the whole-hearted consent of the British people. All else is improper and dangerous. That is the case for a referendum.

Another reason why it is dangerous is that we as parliamentarians have always told people to obey the law, because it has been democratically decided and can be changed democratically through the ballot box. But what if the law is to be made by institutions outside this country, by people who are not elected by us and who cannot be removed by us? If matters such as the running of our economy cannot be affected by voting and if Parliament and the people are to be robbed and stripped of their powers to determine their own future, that will be very dangerous. If it is to be done, the country should do it with its eyes open, consciously understanding what it is doing.

Under our system of parliamentary self-government, the only restricton on the sovereignty of Parliament is, by definition, that no Parliament can bind its successors. I regard that as one of the glories of our constitution. It means that each new generation can do its own thing in its own way. It can make changes peacefully and legally, without violence or bloodshed. All that would go. The treaty would rob future generations of those rights and powers. It even purports to tell future Governments and Parliaments—Governments not yet elected, even—what their budget deficit should be.

We are arrogating, binding, restricting and shackling future generations and Parliaments by seeking to extend our dominion into the future, thus robbing our successors of their freedom of choice. I want no part of that. It is outrageous that Parliament is purporting to do it without consulting the people.

8.47 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer (Worcestershire, South): You have asked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for five-minute speeches. For me to give the reasons why I intend to vote against Third Reading in five minutes is a bit of a tall order, but I shall do it in this way, if I may.

I have had the honour to listen to almost every speech in the past few months during which we have debated the issue. I have detected four arguments in favour of the Maastricht Bill. I intend to spend one minute on each.

The first argument is that Maastricht is a step towards the reassertion of national independence. Two points have been made in favour of that argument. The first is subsidiarity; the second is the intergovernmental agreement.

Subsidiarity seems to me to be the opposite of decentralisation. In order to have subsidiarity, one must have a central organisation that can determine what is subsidiary. Therefore, the Commission and the European Court will determine that we can build the Winchester bypass in return for us letting them run our economy. Somebody has to determine what subsidiarity is, or what

things are to be subsidiary. It has to be done by a central organisation, and that is the opposite of how subsidiarity has been presented to us.

Under European law, the intergovernmental agreement does not work in the way that it has been presented. Title V of the treaty, which proposes a common foreign policy, is subject to the intergovernmental agreement, but in the preamble to the treaty, article B says that a common foreign policy is an objective of the treaty. One fault of our lawyers is that, in negotiating treaties, they ignore the importance of the preamble in European law. That point has been made several times by my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith). A preamble to a treaty determines how lawyers reach their judgments.

The core of the treaty is what matters. The core is a single currency. A single currency means a single Government, not only because a country hands over control of its coinage, money and banking system, but because a single currency means a single pricing system, and since we shall have unequal wages the Greeks will be unhappy about paying German prices on Greek wages. There will therefore have to be a single compensatory authority, a single taxation authority and a single expenditure authority, which are provided for in the Bill. Once a country has handed over control of all that, it has handed over control of most of what is the essence of an independent state.

Those in the institutions of Europe who have really considered the matter concur with that, and once the Maastricht process is completed more people will come out who really know what is going on. For instance, the European Parliament's constitution for European union dropped off the back of a lorry into my lap. It is produced by the Committee on Institutional Affairs. The preamble states:

"With Maastricht", which it assumes to have been passed, "the European Union (EU) has reached an advanced status and a degree of complexity which calls for a codification and with regard to the changing world order for a progressive new step for the realisation of an integrated Europe."

It goes on to spell out what it means: that the Government of Europe should be the Commission and that the Head of State should be the President of the Commission. Rather generously, it says:

"National authorities should be given adequate room for manoeuvre so as to avoid the pitfalls of centralisation; the system should be sufficiently cohesive to prevent the watering-down of joint rules."

The European Parliament is clear that, once Maastricht is passed, we shall move towards codification into a union of Europe.

The second point that is raised in defence of the treaty is that it is so absurd it will not happen and, in particular, that the Germans will save us because they do not want the deutschmark to be subjugated. It is argued, "It does not matter if we pass the thing. We might as well get on with it because it is the best damage containment job that we can do."

One can only say what has been said before: we must accept that this treaty will become the law of the land, and the law of the land will include, for instance, article 109j, which says:

"If by the end of 1997 the date for the beginning of the third stage has not been set, the third stage shall start on 1 January 1999."

That will be the law of the land. We can argue about whether the opt out will apply and whether it matters in the long term—I shall battle for the continuation of the opt out—but the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made an extremely good speech at about three o'clock one morning in which he showed the continuing effect from stage 2 to stage 3; there is not time to go through that now.

It is clear that we cannot go ahead with the treaty on the basis that it will not happen. I suppose that some people went ahead with the Single European Act on the basis that it would not happen; people voted for it without knowing what they were voting for or because they thought that it would not happen.

The third argument, which has been made by several hon. Members, is that, if we do not pass Maastricht, it will be bad for jobs, bad for business and bad for investment. If that is true, why did the Japanese and others invest massively in Britain in the mid-80s, when we had flexible control over our economy? That investment began to dry up when we shadowed the deutschmark and almost came to a grinding halt in the middle of our membership of the ERM.

Now that we have left the ERM, investment is being made again, people are laying investment plans and we have growth and jobs. If our leaving the ERM was such a disaster, why is the opposite being reflected in economic statistics?

It is said that there is no alternative. That depends, of course, on what one thinks of an unelected government of Europe superimposing itself on a democratic constitution such as ours. I do not argue my case on the basis of the eternity of the nation state—the nation state is a relatively recent invention—but from a concern about the replacement of our democratic institutions with undemocratic institutions that will control our lives; surely I must be allowed to say that there is an alternative. The alternative is what we have at the moment, which is a free trading market looking outwards with its democratic institutions intact—an association of independent states. That is what I base my case against the treaty on.

8.55 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I should like to call this a day that will live in infamy, but it has been 26 days, most of which have been nights. It is no ornament —no glorious chapter in our parliamentary history—because we have seen a three-party conspiracy to force on the House and on the country a treaty that the people do not want, and without consulting the people. It has been smuggled through on the basis of assurances, most of which I would call not untruthful but fantastic.

We had assurances—usually from junior spokesmen at dead of night—that all sorts of measures in the treaty do not apply. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen have assured us that nothing is irrevocable and that we can at any time take back the powers that we surrender under the treaty. I hope that they say that when we are in power.

We have had assurances from the Government that there is no compulsion to return to the exchange rate mechanism, despite the fact that stage 2 is built around the irrevocable linking of currencies. As the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said, we shall be forced back into the ERM.

The Danes have been pressured and conned into supporting the treaty at a time when the rest of Europe is turning against it, so the Foreign Secretary found himself in an embarrassing position this afternoon. He has the

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

genius that he always speaks better the worse his case is, which is, I suppose, the art of diplomacy. He ignored what is in the treaty—a treaty with a centralising drive that gives more power to the Commission and takes economic management from national Governments—and asked us to vote for it to get a decentralised Europe, a trammelled Commission and power returned to the parliaments of the national states.

Those were his arguments: vote for it because we want the opposite of what it proposes, which is slightly different from the argument of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen, which is, "Vote for it to get what we hope it actually means, even if what it actually says is not supported by our own people." A gulf is emerging between the Labour party and our own people.

The Labour Front-Bench spokesmen are determined to show themselves good Europeans by abandoning the weapons we need for the economic management of this country to rebuild our manufacturing business base, to return to full employment and to improve the lot of our people. Interest rates, exchange rates, the money supply and the level of Government borrowing will all be abandoned to show ourselves as being communautaire and good Europeans, even if our supporters and voters are not.

Such a stance cannot allow the treaty to be workable. Monetary union is at the treaty's core, and is impossible to achieve. If it proceeds quickly, we shall have "instant eastern Germany", if it proceeds slowly, we need the bridge of the exchange rate mechanism to arrive at that goal, and that bridge cannot be rebuilt. If we make the attempt to achieve that goal, we shall be locked into a deflationary regime and trap. I do not mind if others go ahead with monetary union. It will ruin them and benefit us because we are currently benefiting from competitive devaluation. It was good to see the Chancellor here this afternoon—he was allowed out into the community at last to listen to the arguments in this place. We know that that will not happen—instead, we shall be under intolerable pressure, both internal and external, to go back.

The treaty is outdated. It is a monetarist treaty when we need a Keynesian treaty; it is deflationary, when it should be expansionary. It is a treaty of fixed rate regimes, when we need a competitive devaluation treaty. It is a centralising treaty, when we need a de-centralising treaty. It is an exclusive treaty because it heightens the barriers and makes it more difficult for other countries to join; we need a looser relationship. The treaty is unworkable, but we still have to ratify it.

We have had 26 days of fiddling, fudging and fantasising to implement a treaty that is technically dead. I shall vote against it because the process discredits Parliament and the consequences of the treaty, if implemented, would hit most severely the section of the community whose interests I was elected to advance and whose cause I was elected to support. I shall vote against the treaty to try to re-establish some honour and integrity for the Labour party, as its position lacks those characteristics at present. I hope that a majority of those Labour Members who are free to think and vote for themselves will vote against it. Above all, I shall vote against the treaty because it gives away powers that are not ours to give as Members of Parliament. Those powers belong to the people, and it is essential to let the people speak on the issue.

9.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): As we come to a final decision, the House should not forget that there are deep feelings in the country about our relationship with Europe, particularly the Maastricht treaty. I was greatly influenced by the second world war. My grandfather's generation was decimated by the first world war and my father's generation was decimated by the second world war. I have always felt reluctant, in my heart, to vote for European legislation that has come before the House in the past 23 years. However, I have always gone along with it on the basis of my belief that it would not be of great benefit to my generation, but might benefit my children and grandchildren.

There are two fundamental reasons why I shall support the Government in the Lobby. The first relates to the conflict in western Europe. I believe that we have reached the point of no return—never again should there be a major conflict between the nations of western Europe. Those in the House who remember war know the enormous price that this nation paid in losing a significant percentage of two fine young generations in this century. If we have to pay some price and make some sacrifice to ensure that that never happens again, we should do so.

I also believe that the House has no right to deprive our grandchildren of making decisions about the future of Europe. If I believed that tonight's vote was totally about being for or against a united states of Europe or a federal Europe, I would go into the No Lobby. I do not believe that that is the position tonight—it will be in the future. It will be for another generation to make that decision at another time. My children and grandchildren's generations have the right to make that choice because it will affect their lives far more than the rest of my life.

I shall go into the Lobby reluctantly and with no enthusiasm. The next four years for Europe will be critical, not just for this country, but for the other European countries, many of whose populations have shown considerable reservations about Maastricht. Those reservations were shown by the closeness of the French referendum. The opinions that I hear time and time again in the Council of Europe, on which I have the privilege to serve, have shown me clearly that there are growing doubts about how far Europe should advance towards federalism or a united states of Europe. In the next four years, Europe will have to prove that it can get the balance right between democracy and the institutions that have grown up in Europe. If we do not get it right, and if in a few years the British people are not satisfied, they may well say to Parliament, "So far and no further."

9.4 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Brighton, Kempton (Mr. Bowden) has outlined the classic case for reluctantly voting yes tonight. We have heard the arguments for many years, but there is one major flaw in what he said—if we give the Bill a Third Reading, I do not believe that his children or grandchildren or the children or grandchildren of any hon. Member will have the choice of which he speaks, because

the members of both Front Benches are reneging on the fundamentals of parliamentary democracy as we know them.

I fear that the choice will not exist in economic terms. My hon. Friends have proved that we shall be in an economic straitjacket. Instead of the law enabling the markets to operate for the benefit of all, European law will have as its purpose the creation of markets and their regulation. The high priests will be the members of the Commission, dancing around the golden calf of the markets.

The same is true of the agendas of the various councils in which the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs has been involved. The Secretary of State, whoever he may be, will find that he has to deal with a wide range of subjects, not only foreign affairs. It will be a question not of the pillars supporting the central European Economic Community that was, but of a single edifice. It is no use saying that there will be only one policy.

We recall the Foreign Secretary talking about Croatia not so long ago. He said that a single policy had already been agreed and, but for that policy, Germany would have recognised Croatia a little sooner and we a little later. There may be a single policy, but it can be the wrong one. Everyone to whom I speak knows that that recognition led to some of the things that we see now.

Perhaps the nations involved and the aid agencies do not realise that if the Bill is passed we shall have a single overseas development policy, not an aid policy but a development policy based on the mercantilist selfishness of the European Community. Who can pretend that, in that so-called intergovernmental pillar, there is a distinction between the creation of a single market, the external Community policy for commerce and a common external tariff, a common foreign and security policy and a common defence policy? They move together in a single edifice.

I shall conclude because I may be the last person to speak against the Bill on the subject of citizenship. When Big Ben strikes at midnight in a few weeks, hours or months, we shall, willy-nilly, become citizens of the European union, as will the electors who sent us here. We shall become citizens of the European union without their permission and without receiving any mandate at the election. They will be subject to doubts and obligations and Parliament will be subject to the courts of the European Community, as will the Crown. This could be the end of British parliamentary democracy as we know it. There is no reason for the Minister of State to laugh, because that is what some of us fear.

I hope that I am wrong, but I believe that, in a few years, if a student asks a tutor whether the British constitution, the freedom of the subject and parliamentary democracy were undermined for constitutional reasons, the answer will be no. The next question will be whether there was a mandate from the people, and the answer from members of both Front Benches will again be no. That is why many of my colleagues will be voting no tonight.

9.8 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): This debate —which has achieved in breadth what the Committee stage achieved in depth—has been marked by two features. First, it has been characterised by the humorous, wide-ranging and eloquent speeches of some of the most senior Members in the House; secondly, it has been notable for the humorous, wide-ranging and eloquent maiden speech of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler).

Following a year in which the name of a town called Maastricht has been heard throughout the House, it was good for us to hear something about the town of Milton Keynes. The hon. Gentleman showed detailed knowledge, a healthy scepticism about the political process, a broad vision of what needs to be done and a sense of humour. I particularly liked his reference to the road that had been started under the Roman empire, and had been completed in the last year—courtesy, no doubt, of the European regional development fund. His basic view is, I think, shared throughout the House: those of us who support greater European co-operation do so primarily because of the threat to peace that lasted for so much of this century, and the knowledge that European co-operation can help to prevent future war.

As the Opposition have made clear—not just on Third Reading, but throughout the Committee stage—we support the Maastricht process because we believe that co-operation, rather than isolationism, is the best way forward in economic policy. We believe that the single market requires the countervailing institutions of a Community; and we believe that, if we are to achieve the high levels of growth in employment and investment that we and the rest of Europe need, international co-operation is essential in an increasingly global economy.

Indeed, we believe that what is new and pressing is the need for the growing international competition between great trading blocs, and especially the high level of growth now being achieved by the Pacific rim countries, to be met by greater co-operation within Europe. Without that co-operation, Britain risks being left behind, losing inward investment and losing British company investment to mainland Europe. It may cease to be the financial centre of Europe.

We also believe that the cohesion fund, majority voting on the environment and the advances on regional and social policy are good for Britain and Europe. However, we cannot and will not vote for a Bill that denies Britain the benefits of a social chapter. The opt-out clause negotiated by the Government is retrograde, perverse and backward-looking: it is a piece of Government dogma which, as everyone knows, is designed not to unite the country, but simply to unite the Conservative party for the time being—even at the expense of dividing the country. If the Foreign Secretary was really serious about searching for consensus on these great issues of Europe, he should support the social chapter rather than oppose it.

This is our argument. It is absolutely clear that—when we need to use the benefits of international co-operation to strengthen the British economy; when, even now, we should be building, post-Maastricht, a European investment, employment and industrial strategy that would assist Britain—the Government are refusing to consider measures that are essential to achieve that, both at home and in Europe. I refer not just to economic co-operation, but to the benefits provided by a Community through the social chapter.

I believe that, after the long discussion to which the Bill has been subjected, the most important thing is for

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

European co-operation in relation to industry, employment and growth—long-term growth for the future—to be assisted by new measures originated in Britain, and hopefully acceptable in Europe.

As my hon. Friends are aware, we have presented proposals for new and flexible interpretations of the public expenditure criteria in the treaty, answering the criticisms of the current criteria. It is sad that the Government have refused to act, or to say anything about our proposals. We have pressed for greater investment expenditure to be available to the European investment bank, answering calls made not just in Britain but throughout Europe for joint European action. Unfortunately, the Government have done the least that they could get away with. In our new document on Europe, we have pressed for a substantial reform of the common agricultural policy. Sadly—even after all the Government's boasts about the CAP reforms that they have achieved—it will still cost more next year than last year, and it is costing more this year than last year. The substantial reform for which we asked has not been achieved.

We have presented proposals for action against speculation in Europe, to reform the exchange rate mechanism and to place a growth and regional strategy side by side with it. I understand that, despite all the talk of the changes needed in the ERM, the Government have not advanced any real proposals to the European monetary authorities that are debating the matter on Friday.

Perhaps the Chancellor will be prepared to tell us whether he now supports the principle of a managed exchange rate and whether it is true that he proposed to the Cabinet that we should not re-enter the ERM at any point during this Parliament.

We have also put forward proposals that would enhance the power of ECOFIN, strengthening its institutions and building on their responsibilities under the treaty as laid down and debated within Europe. But the Government have done nothing; they have not even supported the French proposals that would increase the accountability of the European institutions through the role of ECOFIN.

We have made proposals for a joint industrial policy at a European level, which would tackle the problems revealed only a few days ago by a report which said that, among 5,000 European companies, Britain alone was cutting overall investment in research and development, and that among all the countries we had the biggest slowdown in training expenditure. Yet the Government have again resisted any attempt to secure the co-operation necessary for the advances in industry that we need.

Perhaps even more worrying is the fact that, while we have pressed for a tougher regional policy, concentrating especially on the small and medium-sized firms that will be at the heart of any economic revival that we can achieve, I have here a letter from the European Commission showing that Britain is not even bothering to pick up the money committed to it by the European regional authorities.

There is now an outstanding sum of £900 million that Europe is ready to commit to projects in Britain, but, because of our delays and our inability to collect, or even to apply for, many of those resources, we are not helping many of the depressed areas in this country. Yet Britain has the most to gain from advancing on that front, since of all the major countries in Europe we have suffered the biggest fall in business investment during the recession years from 1990 and the biggest fall in employment, the biggest rise in unemployment, and the largest fall in manufacturing output.

When the Chancellor sums up, I should like him to confirm that in December, far from supporting the full and complete policy for growth discussed at the European summit, he thwarted a £200 million training initiative that would have helped people in Britain. Will he also tell us what the Government's attitude is to the new unemployment initiative being proposed in Europe? Does it make sense to lose British jobs and to fail to support European initiatives that would create jobs, simply as a means of holding the Conservative party together in some anti-European crusade? The Chancellor is holding back the job prospects of many people in Britain.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Department of Trade and Industry has within its doors a report that reveals the difficulties that the British economy faces. Investment in skills is up to 40 per cent. below the level in Europe and in the rest of the world; productivity is 30 per cent. below, and manufacturing investment is up to 100 per cent. below, the level in the rest of the world.

Our complaint against the Government is not only that they are unclear about future policy, but that, far from promoting the real policy measures for co-ordination and co-operation to achieve growth and employment in Europe, they threaten to thwart them in just about every forum in which they are involved.

Mr. Shore: I have listened with interest to what my hon. Friend has said, but is there not a large element of wishful thinking in the various propositions that he has advanced? They are all about getting Europe to do things, yet far from those propositions being in the treaty in its present form, precisely the opposite propositions are in the treaty. The treaty is about not growth but deflation. That is at its heart and my hon. Friend should address that problem.

Mr. Brown: I respect my right hon. Friend's contributions both to this debate and to many others, but I believe that he has misunderstood article 2 of the Maastricht treaty, which states clearly that the aims are growth and employment. Indeed, written into the treaty are proposals for an industry policy for Europe, a technology policy for Europe and a training and skills policy for Europe. With regard to the public expenditure criteria, I believe that my right hon. Friend would agree that the Labour party has led the way in calling for a flexible examination and assessment of the spending criteria. It is interesting that we are now receiving support from other countries in Europe—*[Interruption.]*

The Minister of State, who I believe is attending one of his last debates as a Minister, says, "Greece." Only the other day, the Belgian Finance Minister who will take over the presidency of European Finance Ministers said exactly what we have been saying for many months. It is wrong, in the circumstances in which the Government now find themselves, to say that a flexible interpretation of the spending rules is not to the benefit of Britain and Europe if we are to achieve the growth initiative we want.

If we are to solve the investment, technology and research gap that not only exists between ourselves and the

rest of Europe but which is growing between Europe and the rest of the world, common action in those areas and greater co-operation as proposed in the treaty is not only to the benefit of Europe but is particularly to the benefit of Britain. I find it difficult to understand why, as a matter of ideology, the Government insist on rejecting proposals that would assist the British economy and growth in the European area, particularly when we shall face growing competition with the Pacific rim in future years.

Mr. Winnick: Article 104c contains two and a half pages of steps that should be taken to achieve convergence, while another protocol refers to 3 per cent. Does not that mean that, however flexible a Labour Government—I am not referring to a Tory Government—may be, the fact remains that it is in the treaty? Is my hon. Friend aware that steps that I hope a Labour Government would want to take would be vetoed under article 104c? That is one of many reasons why some of us are determined to vote against the Bill.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend has a long record of contributing to debates on this issue. I can best answer his question by quoting what the treaty says on that subject:

"The commission shall also take into account whether the Government deficit exceeds Government investment expenditure, and shall take into account all other relevant factors, including the medium-term economic and budgetary position of the Member State."

If that does not allow for the flexible interpretation about which we have been talking, I do not know what does.

The Chancellor should be interested in the measures that we propose for greater co-operation to achieve employment growth and industrial investment because of what has been happening to the British economy during his period in office. The right hon. Gentleman has been in some difficulty in recent years, having lost the support of many newspapers. Indeed, I find it difficult to think of any newspapers that support him. *The Sun* supported him, then opposed him, supported him again but now opposes him. He has lost a great deal of Conservative party support in the country.

On Monday this week, in a document from the Royal Bank of Scotland, we found that the right hon. Gentleman had lost the support even of his former Treasury adviser, a gentleman who was at the Department from 1989 to 1992. What the aptly named Mr. Warwick Lightfoot said must give the Chancellor scope to think not only of what he should be doing to improve the British economy but of what he should be doing to improve our economy through measures taken in Europe as well.

"No mechanism for achieving the inflation objective has been established"—

said Mr. Lightfoot.

"Demand growth over any recovery will outstrip supply potential . . . Potential output has been harmed by the recession to a very great extent . . . Much of the fiscal deficit is permanent."

Mr. Lightfoot seemingly knows the department and dimension of the hole in the Government's affairs that the Home Secretary described—*[Interruption.]* I am quoting what was said by an adviser to the Treasury until only a few months ago. He went on:

"Little growth will be possible before the economy comes up against inflation and balance of payments constraints. The danger is that the continuation of stop-go policies will do further long-term damage to the growth potential of the United Kingdom economy."

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Yesterday's man.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman may be thinking of what Mr. Lightfoot said about the Chancellor, the Chancellor being yesterday's man. Mr. Lightfoot added:

"We are forced to conclude that the United Kingdom is once again embarked on a roller coaster of stop-go economic policies which will do long-term harm to the growth potential of the United Kingdom economy."

If that were not enough, what about the comments of the Financial Secretary? I do not think that people have realised the significance of the speech that he made only a few days ago. He said—*[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) should listen to what a Minister of the Crown has said about the policies pursued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. *[Interruption.]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, Conservative Members usually want to hear what Ministers have said, but they do not seem to want to today.

The Financial Secretary said:

"Think back six years ago"—

the time when the Prime Minister became Chief Secretary and the Chancellor joined the Treasury.

"The yuppy revolution was in full swing, but it was built on sand. The wheeler-dealer was the man of the moment. The best returns were to be found in trading financial assets."

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have sat here throughout almost the whole debate and I have enjoyed it, but we have been listening to the hon. Gentleman for 17 minutes and I do not believe that he has mentioned the Bill once.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Opposition spokesman has clearly been addressing the wider issues of Maastricht.

Mr. Brown: I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker, referring to the Government's economic mismanagement, which spills over into everything that they do, especially into how they see their future in Europe.

The Financial Secretary concluded, speaking of companies at that time:

"Far from being sure-fire winners, many were in fact sure-fire losers. We can see them today marked by 'to let' boards. The resources that were attracted like moths to a lamp-bulb to the lure of easy money are resources that have been wasted. We are talking about the misallocation of resources in our economy."

I maintain that the social chapter and the Government's other moves on public expenditure show that their vision of the British economy, in Europe and elsewhere, is that of a low-tech, low-skill, low-employment and low-wage economy. That was summed up best by the advertisement whose authorship no Minister has ever denied. Placed in Germany by the DTI, it is called for people to invest in Britain because of the low wages there.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman has told us a great deal about Government policy, but will he turn his mind to the impact of the Maastricht treaty on the treaty of union between Scotland and England, and to the fact that economic, fiscal and monetary decisions will be given away to Europe? Why does he think it right to hold a referendum on how we vote to elect Members to this place but wrong that the Scottish people should have a say in what happens to the agreement of 1707?

Mr. Brown: We had a referendum on Europe in 1975. Everyone knows that it conclusively showed what public opinion was.

This debate has been going on in the House for many weeks and views on both sides of the argument have been expressed. I believe that we need co-operation in Europe to achieve high employment and a high-growth economy. Instead, the Government have landed themselves in the position of having to opposed the social chapter.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *rose*——

Mr. Brown: I will not give way again, as I have only a few moments left.

Conservative Members must face up to the truth. We have had four years of propaganda directed against the social chapter. Virulent allegations have been made about it almost every day and every month. There were claims that union militancy would explode as a result, that thousands of jobs would be lost and so on. The campaign must have cost the Conservative party millions of pounds, particularly during the European elections—yet, after all that, they have gained hardly a single convert to their cause.

I can think of no other country in Europe which now supports the Government's position on the social chapter. I can think of no country applying to enter the European Community which supports their views on the social chapter. I can think of no other party in Europe, apart from the French fascist party, which has given support to the Government's position on the social chapter. Even Conservative MEPs have not even been able to persuade all the Conservative group in the European Parliament to go along with them.

At the Edinburgh summit last December, everone recognised that far from gaining support as a result of what has happened over the past few years, far from people saying that Britain was right, the conclusions of the presidency on 12 December were that the Commission would proceed with the directives on the social chapter and not vary from its course of action.

When the social chapter covers the free movement of workers, principles of equal treatment, fair remuneration, improved living and working conditions and social protection on rules and practices proper to each country, is not the proper way to deal with objections to the social chapter to work with the principle and then change the detail rather than oppose the principle and allow other countries to set the detail?

When the effect on the British people of abandoning the charter and opting out is to deny us benefits of the social action programmes that now cover 6 million part-time workers, fair and equal treatment for women at work, protection for young people, the right to minimum holiday leave and better information for employees, is not the intelligent position to ensure that the rights of these vulnerable people are protected by signing up to the charter in principle and then participating constructively in the discussions if we want to change it?

Let us be clear that the rules will affect British workers indirectly, if not directly, because they will affect British companies in other countries and will be applied by foreign companies in Britain. There will be rules and directives which British companies, Commissioners, trades unions and MEPs can discuss, but only the Government have contrived that, when the Council of Ministers is considering them, there will be an empty chair for Britain.

Far from these provisions adding to the social cost, they would enhance the economic efficiency of the British economy. Our failure to realise that our future depends on investment in the skills and well-being of our employees is at the heart of the Conservative failure to cope with the problems of the British economy. Let us remember that over the past few years all the objections that the Conservative party says were so integral to their opposition to the social chapter have virtually collapsed under the pressure of detailed argument.

For example, they said that it would mean strikes and lock-outs, but even their own briefing document for debates in the House of Commons says that the social chapter excludes pay, the right to association, the right to strike and the right to impose lock-outs.

The director of social affairs at the employers' organisation—the Foreign Secretary was prepared to quote him—says:

"There is a clear understanding that it cannot be used in any way in laws relating to strikes or unions and in any event we would not agree to any agreement which had such effect."

Far from its being the charter that Conservative Members have tried to convince the country about without any great success, the social chapter lays down clearly what it involves.

In regard to the works council directive, hon. Members should pause to note that the President of the Board of Trade, who the Prime Minister has charged with relations with industry, said that there should be legislation for companies with more than 500 employees to conduct a dialogue with their work force. He said:

"this Government will never sign the social chapter."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 170.]

That was no off-the-cuff remark, or throwaway comment. It was a deliberate statement. Had he cleared it with the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary? If he had, why is it that when the Foreign Secretary was challenged to endorse what the Chancellor said, he signally refused to rise to his feet?

We know that there is opposition in the Cabinet to the position that the Chancellor has held on these as on other matters. We know that the President of the Board of Trade, as has been said today, supports the social chapter. We also know that if the Chancellor holds to the view that the Government will not, under any circumstances, sign the social chapter, he will create a major difficulty for the Government if, at the time of the vote next month, the House votes that it cannot ratify the treaty without the social chapter. When the Chancellor replies to the debate, he had better tell us what he proposes to do.

Our view on these matters is that, while we support the Maastricht process, we are not prepared to support a Bill that continues to exclude the social chapter from British law. Is it not the case that it has been the role of the Conservative party throughout the ages to restrict progressive legislation that would help employees? That is why it opposes the social chapter. I urge—I urge the Chancellor to change his mind about the social chapter because if he does not, the British people will eventually change his mind for him.

9.36 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): Every hon. Member will have noticed that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was lost for the last line of his speech. He could not bring himself to utter the words, "I urge my hon. Friends to abstain," although that was what he meant. Throughout much of his speech, the hon. Gentleman did not mention the word Maastricht. He tried to turn it into a general debate on the economy. If he wants such a debate, let us have one. Let him table a motion and we shall debate it and defend our position, as we have done again and again.

We are now drawing to the end of what has been an important and passionate debate, which that has aroused controversy and strong feelings not just in the House but across the continent. The House has spent hundreds of hours looking at every detail of the Bill. I have noticed that some people in Europe have been somewhat frustrated, if not annoyed, at the pace of our progress, but we do not owe them any apologies. It is right that we should deliberate carefully on a treaty of such importance, and it is also right that the final decision should be taken here in the House.

Mr. Benn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: In a minute. I agree with what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West said about the quality of speeches that we have heard, including that from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn).

In particular, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on a remarkable and excellent maiden speech. I am sure that all who heard it found it highly entertaining, not least because of his descriptions of the late Robert Maxwell's legacy and of the roundabouts in his constituency. He struck a note for many when he said—I know that he was speaking for some of my hon. Friends—that he accepted rather than welcomed the Maastricht treaty. He gave us a salutary reminder when he said that our trade and interests are not just in Europe but in the wider world. He is the last of the new Members of Parliament to make a maiden speech, but it was a pleasure deferred and we look forward to hearing him again.

My hor. Friend the Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) said that he strongly felt that, after the debate was over, there should be no continuing recriminations in our party, and I strongly agree with him. We must all recognise that there have been strong feeling on both sides of the House and people have legitimate feelings and every reason to put their views. Recriminations will have to be put aside. As my hon. Friend said, what we are deciding affects the future of the country. It is of profound importance, but it is not a decision about whether we want to join a federal Europe. We do not want to join a federal Europe, and that is not the kind of Europe that the Maastricht treaty will create. The first draft of the treaty, which was produced by the Dutch, included a federal goal, but that draft was rightly rejected.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said, the argument in Europe is now turning in our direction, and it has been doing so since the Maastricht process began. Even in Germany today, there are growing doubts about the social chapter and even about monetary union and a single currency. My right hon. Friend said that we should seize the opportunity, and how right he is, because we have never had a better chance to lead Europe in the direction that we, rather than the federalists, wish to go. That is why the House should ratify the Maastricht treaty. If we do not, we shall effectively place ourselves at the margins of Europe's affairs, cut off, devoid of influence, and leaving the field to those who are pursuing an entirely different agenda.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) said, there are elements of the Community that we do not like, such an excessive regulation, the waste, bureaucracy and the expense of the common agricultural policy. The Government also abhor the job-destroying social chapter.

Mr. Benn: The right hon. Gentleman and other Ministers have laid great emphasis on the decision being taken by the House of Commons. If the Government fail to get half the Members of the House to vote for the treaty, would that be regarded as the full-hearted consent that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), a former Prime Minister, wanted, and would the Chancellor be able to go to his European colleagues and say, "That justifies ratification of the treaty"?

Mr. Lamont: I am absolutely certain that we shall have a substantial majority, and that is what matters. The hon. Gentleman has made his case for a referendum. It was debated, put to the House and rejected, and the right hon. Gentleman should accept that.

By ratifying the Maastricht treaty, we shall maintain a voice and we can fight for the Europe that we want while keeping crucial decisions in our own hands. The House should remember that at Maastricht we signed a treaty that was very different from the one signed by other countries. It leaves us out of the social chapter, which is potentially the most damaging part of the treaty, and it gives us a separate decision over a single currency. That is of great importance.

Mr. Cash *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I want to reply to some of the points made in the debate.

We may all have our own views about monetary union, about whether it is likely in the short term or desirable in the longer term, but we cannot ignore the simple fact that many others in Europe want it to happen. The attempt to bring into being a single currency carries obvious risks, one of which is that we may become locked into a single European monetary policy that is wholly inappropriate to our economy. If that happened, we would be on a slippery slope, because pressures would grow for huge transfers of resources across the Community, and there would be calls for even closer political union.

That is why the Government were simply not prepared to sign up to a single currency now. Our protocol, which I negotiated, gives this country complete freedom of manoeuvre for the future. If we ratify the treaty, it will allow us to take part in all the discussions and negotiations about a single currency, but it will not commit us to join one. It explicitly gives the House a separate decision about joining a single currency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate said that, if we kept that option open, the pressure would be so great that we would be forced to join a single currency. If my hon. Friend really believes that the arguments against a single currency are so overwhelming, surely he cannot oppose

[Mr. Lamont]

merely keeping the option open until we have to make a decision, at which time the argument can be considered on its merits and my hon. Friend can put his case. I understand his anxiety, but if the case against is so strong it cannot be right to foreclose all options.

The choice before us is simple. We are not being asked whether we want to join a single currency. That is a question for later, and it is provided for in the protocol. The question for now is whether, if a currency union is established on the continent, this country should have the right to seek to join if the House so wishes, after a separate Act of Parliament has gone through the House. I simply fail to understand how British sovereignty would be enhanced if we forwent that right which was negotiated at Maastricht and is enshrined in the United Kingdom protocol.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend explain how much influence we have exerted over the arguments about the so-called fault lines in the ERM as a result of the ECOFIN report? Will he also explain how much influence we can exert in stage 2, when the Governor of the Bank of England can neither seek nor be given instructions by the Government when he is a member of the European Monetary Institute.

Mr. Lamont: If my hon. Friend will give way, I shall come to those points.

Securing our protocol was a real negotiating success. It is really quite remarkable that the Labour party still opposes it. If the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had his way, we would not have any choice—once we passed the Bill, if we fulfilled the convergence criteria we would be sent straight down the road to a single currency. We do not know today what the prospects for the single currency will be, we cannot predict all its implications and we do not know who will be in it. However, that does not bother the right hon. and learned Gentleman—he would board the train no matter who was on it, no matter where it was going. Quite simply, he would be prepared to drive the economic and political future of the nation into the buffers.

During this long debate, questions have been raised about the nature of stage 2 of monetary union. My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate asked whether we were taking on some onerous obligations. There have been many controversies surrounding the Bill, but one thing is quite certain—the worries expressed about stage 2 are misplaced. Throughout the negotiations, I believed that in stage 2 it was essential that economic and monetary policy should remain firmly in national hands. That was our negotiating objective and that was what we achieved.

Whether or not a single currency is established, and whether or not we choose to join, the economic goals represented in the convergence criteria are objectives that we should all share—low inflation, sound finances and low budget deficits. Those are the economic objectives that the Government has been pursuing for almost a decade and a half. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said, under stage 2—or, indeed stage 3 if we do not participate in it—there is no question of our being legally bound to achieve them or being penalised in any way if we do not.

I have been a little surprised by some of the anxiety that my hon. Friends have identified relating to budget deficits and the provisions applying to them. The Conservative party believes in sound finance and low deficits. Nothing in the treaty interferes with the sovereignty of the Government of this country in monetary and fiscal matters in stage 2. However, the treaty does allow for the Council of Ministers to monitor in stage 2 how countries are progressing with economic convergence, but that is not the same as imposing penalties or being able to compel countries to pursue particular policies. Of course it is irksome when international organisations express opinions about our affairs, but that has been going on for decades—through the OECD, the G7, the IMF and the European Community.

On the prospects for EMU and the questions raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), the past 12 months have been a setback for those who wish to see an early march to a single currency. As well as sterling's departure from the ERM, there have been three devaluations within the ERM by Spain; two by Portugal; one by Ireland; and one devaluation by Italy within the ERM, followed by the lira's exit from the system. That leaves aside countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway, which were forced to break their links with the ERM.

In all, no fewer than eight countries had their policies overthrown last September. All that puts paid to the idea, held on the Opposition Benches, that last September was somehow an event unique to Britain.

I come now to the exchange rate mechanism and I want to answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford and a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir. P. Tapsell) during Prime Minister's questions. Let me make it crystal clear. There is no obligation, in the convergence criteria or anywhere else in the treaty, to make Britain rejoin the ERM. There was pressure to include such an obligation in the treaty; I was wholly opposed to that and I successfully resisted it.

The only obligation to join the ERM is if a country wants to go to stage 3 of monetary union, in which case it has to be a member of the narrow bands of the ERM for two years before moving to stage 3.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lamont: I am answering my hon. Friends.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear our position on the ERM yesterday. The Government will not even begin to contemplate rejoining the ERM until Britain's economy is more in step with the rest of Europe. Above all, that means that economic conditions in Germany and Britain will need to be much more closely in line than they are now. After the great boom caused by reunification, the German economy is now moving even deeper into recession, while the British recovery is strengthening. So the needs and objectives of monetary policy are quite different.

It is impossible to predict how long it will take for the German economy to adjust fully to the massive strains caused by reunification. It may take two years, three years or longer, but until it does, it would not be appropriate for us to contemplate joining the ERM. It would not be in our economic interests and the Government will not do it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford made the point that passing the treaty will give Britain and the Government a real opportunity to influence the future debate in the Community. Subsidiarity is only the beginning. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) has said in previous debates about taxation matters and retaining the fiscal sovereignty of the House. But we must push subsidiarity to the top of the agenda at every Council meeting.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford said, we see a wider Europe, a different Europe, a free trading Europe. Above all, we see a Europe that concentrates on letting the peoples of Europe go about their business of creating the investment, jobs and prosperity that we all want to see, not a Europe of meddling bureaucrats always seeking more power, more influence and more leverage over independent member states.

Another area of the treaty that has taken up much time in today's debate is the social chapter. My right hon. Friend the Member for Woking said that in Europe, which is one of the higher unemployment regions in the world economy, employers already face substantial burdens and social costs in competing with other economies, particularly, as the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East recognised, now that Europe is now in competition with the dynamic new economies of the far east.

Of course we all want higher living standards, but we have to earn them. We will not get them simply by piling up labour or social costs. We will get them by being competitive, by attracting investment from abroad and by encouraging investment at home.

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Chancellor said in his Budget statement that the Government will never sign the social charter. Will he confirm what the Foreign Secretary refused to confirm—that that is the Government's policy and that they will never sign it under any circumstances, even in the face of a decision of the House?

Mr. Lamont: The social chapter is the last thing that Britain or Europe needs. That is why we insisted on our opt out and the treaty that we will ratify will be the one that we negotiated at Maastricht. We put Britain first. We always have and we always will.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lamont: No, sit down.

What is more, unlike Opposition Members, I do not believe that social policy should be decided in Brussels. I believe that it should be decided in this country and in this House. I know that some of my hon. Friends are concerned that the Commission and other countries will use means other than the social chapter. My hon. Friends the Members for Reigate and for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) made the point that they might use other means to impose obligations and costs on this country. I agree with those of my hon. Friends who complain that the health and safety provisions in the Single European Act have been used in a wholly improper way, to foist on this country laws that we do not want.

The question before us tonight, however, is not the Single European Act but the Maastricht treaty—and the treaty has a clear-cut protocol that unambiguously takes this country out of the social chapter.

No one should underestimate the potential threat that the social chapter poses. It is

"a really worrying attempt by Europe . . . to try to rebuild in Britain the things that we have dismantled over the past 12 to 15 years."

[Interruption.] I hear them scoff, but those were the words of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). As usual, he has changed his mind and changed his policy, and tonight he wants to change his vote. But it is clear that no one on the Conservative side of the House would possibly want to put our opt out at risk.

What about Labour? What is their leader's vision of Europe? He is not even here for tonight's debate. It is quite unfair to say that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East does not have a European policy, because he has three. When it comes to the treaty, he does not know whether he wants to pass it, oppose it or wreck it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman, like his predecessor, trots around Europe, posing for photocalls with leaders of other socialist parties, declaring his belief in all things European.

After the photocall in November, the right hon. and learned Gentleman even signed a communiqué saying:

"we . . . hope the process of ratification will be completed as soon as possible without further renegotiation."

What did he do about it? He voted against the paving motion, called for delay until after the Edinburgh summit, opposed each and every closure motion, and put narrow party advantage above national interest—not just once, but hour after hour, day after day, and week after week.

Then, in his embarrassment, the right hon. and learned Gentleman had to send the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) fumbling around Europe to apologise for their filibustering. The right hon. Gentleman had a meeting with Mr. Cot. I wonder whether my right hon. and hon. Friends remember him. He is the leader of the socialists in the European Parliament.

On 4 November, the right hon. Member for Copeland told the House that he had personally discussed Labour's position with Mr. Cot and other European socialist leaders and that they fully understood and supported its position. Just three days later, Mr. Cot gave us his side of the story:

"I must say I was a bit puzzled by Labour's demand to postpone the ratification process in Westminster . . . stop playing Russian roulette . . .! This stupid game just isn't funny."

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East likes to boast of his principled stand on Europe. In the endless profiles and interviews in the Sunday newspapers, he always tells how he voted against his party for our entry into the Common Market, and in off-the-record briefings he tells how he has lectured his party on how to be pro-European. Where are his principles now? [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] Where is his party?

What does the right hon. and learned Gentleman propose to do tonight with the important question before the House? He is going to take a principled stand on Third Reading. He is going to abstain. He will not be sitting on his rebels—he will be sitting on his hands. That is a pathetic spectacle.

At the end of the day, the right hon. and learned Gentleman must either be for the treaty or against it. His right hon. and hon. Friends have not been impressed. I wonder whether the House can guess who it was who said that there was a

"lack of direction . . . a lack of leadership"?

[Mr. Lamont]

It was the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould). Who was it who said that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's "naive Euro-enthusiasm" had reduced him to an "unparalleled state of impotence"? It was the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). And who called his own Front Bench "disastrous and supine"? It was the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). The Leader of the Opposition cannot convince his party, and he will not convince the country. We shall vote tonight for ratification of the treaty. The position of the Labour party is a hollow sham. We have put our case tonight, and we shall put it to the country as well.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 292, Noes 112.

Division No. 277] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Home Robertson, John
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macdonald, Calum
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon M'chael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Radice, Giles
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael

Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles (Bexhill)
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George (Acton)

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Allason, Rupert (Torbay)
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Berry, Dr. Roger
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Budgen, Nicholas
Butcher, John
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ronnie (Blyth V)
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlisle, John (Luton North)
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cran, James
Cryer, Bob
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil (Llanelli)
Davis, Terry (B'ham, H'dge H'l)
Donohoe, Brian H.
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fry, Peter
Gardiner, Sir George
Gerrard, Neil
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gould, Bryan
Greenway, Harry (Ealing N)
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, George (Knowsley N)
Hughes, Kevin (Doncaster N)
Hughes, Roy (Newport E)
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Lynne (B'ham S O)
Knapman, Roger
Legg, Barry
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lord, Michael
McAllion, John
McKelvey, William
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David (Shettleston)
Marshall, Jim (Leicester, S)
Michie, Bill (Sheffield Heeley)
Mitchell, Austin (Gt Grimsby)
Moate, Sir Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Mudie, George
Oliner, William
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pawsey, James
Pickthall, Colin
Pope, Greg
Porter, David (Waveney)
Prentice, Ms Bridget (Lew'm E)
Prentice, Gordon (Pendle)
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Jo
Robathan, Andrew
Ross, William (E Londonderry)
Rowlands, Ted
Shepherd, Richard (Aldridge)
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew (Blaenau Gwent)
Spicer, Michael (S Worcs)
Stevenson, George
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Sir Teddy (Southend, E)
Townend, John (Bridlington)
Trimble, David
Walker, Bill (N Tayside)
Watson, Mike
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan (Sw'n W)
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann (Congleton)
Winterton, Nicholas (Macc'f'ld)
Wise, Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nigel Spearing and Mr. Ron Leighton.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Worthing (A27 Bypass)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

10.12 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Some years ago, I had the distinction of running in the athletic race immediately after Sir Roger Bannister ran the first four-minute mile. I felt a sense of anti-climax, and, following the vote on the Maastricht treaty, I have the same feeling tonight in raising the A27 in Worthing. To many of my constituents, the immediate and perhaps even the long-term impact of what is proposed for the A27 in the Worthing area may be of much greater importance than the Maastricht treaty.

What should be done about the A27 has been a matter of great controversy for 15 or 20 years, and I have raised the matter with a succession of Ministers in Adjournment debates. I have forgotten to how many Ministers I have had to explain the problem, but I am delighted to see the Minister in his place this evening because he has been kind enough to visit Worthing and examine the situation for himself.

I have argued throughout for a real bypass for Worthing, not what the Government have proposed—a preferred route, which is a throughpass, not a bypass, and which cuts the town in two.

Therefore, it is important that, as the matter comes to a climax with a public inquiry, specific issues should be raised, and I am happy to have the chance to do so this evening. There is still much uncertainty about precisely when the public inquiry is likely to take place. If I achieve nothing else, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could give some information on that issue, which is of great interest to my constituents.

Everywhere along the south coast, apart from Worthing, even quite small villages have or are about to have bypasses. It is wrong that the same should not be true of Worthing. A statement issued not long ago—greeted enthusiastically by my constituents who detected a change of Government attitude—stated that the Government's policy was to take traffic away from towns. The Government's preferred route certainly does not do that.

When the original proposal of 12 years ago or more was dropped, it became apparent that if something was not done, developments of the A27 either side of Worthing would eventually meet in the middle, and there would be no possibility of a bypass. It therefore became necessary to reopen the issue. At that time, the relevant Minister, now Lady Chalker, was kind enough to give a clear undertaking that a complete study would be made, not only of the preferred route, but of alternative routes which would be genuine bypasses.

We are in an unusual position—it may be unprecedented. Work has been carried out on the preferred route. In addition, a detailed survey has been conducted into the economics and other aspects of both the preferred route and the bypass. Therefore, the public inquiry and the examiner will be able to look in detail at both proposals. Many of my constituents were concerned that the public inquiry would be able only to say yes or no to the preferred route.

Therefore, I am happy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that that is not the position. In a letter that I received a few days ago, he said:

[Sir Terence Higgins]

"I am satisfied that the Department was right to look at the preferred route, and the alternative blue and red routes, before draft orders were published. The full traffic, environmental and economic assessment of these routes will be available at the public inquiry to enable the issues to be fully debated, and these alternatives, together with any other alternatives which may be proposed, will be considered by the Inspector."

The letter continues—this is the crucial passage:

"I can confirm that the Inspector will be able to make recommendations either to make the draft orders before the inquiry, modified if necessary, or to reject them. In the latter case, he may also recommend that new draft orders are prepared for one of the alternative routes."

It is important that the inspector should have the option of recommending new draft orders on the basis of a bypass.

The recent exhibitions setting out the various alternatives were not entirely unbiased, and concentrated on the preferred route rather than the alternatives. The videos run at those exhibitions clearly showed that the damage to the downs done by the preferred route would be significant, particularly in those regions where the downs are most accessible to my constituents. That fact must be clearly brought out.

Time and again we have had new and specific inquiries into the issues. It has become apparent that the first inquiry suggested that the preferred route would be much more economic in cost-benefit terms than the bypass—I refer to the route north, not south, of Cissbury ring. I cannot find many people in favour of the bypass that passes south of Cissbury ring. It has become apparent that the economics have begun to converge. If one also takes into account the need to run a dual carriageway through Findon valley, the economics may favour a bypass rather than the preferred route.

I stress that one of the important elements in assessing the preferred route has been the cost of delays which occur where the road is built and which I understand may last for two years or more. I draw the Minister's attention to the *Worthing Herald* of Friday 30 April. The headline is "Road Chaos in Town" and above it is the lin

"Fire-fighters face potentially fatal delays in traffic mayhem".

That is the result of minor changes at the Offington roundabout, which will be the epicentre of the chaos that is likely to be caused by the preferred route. If we proceed with the preferred route rather than the bypass, that will be the shape of things to come. Massive delays have already been caused, some lasting for more than an hour over a matter of only a few hundred yards. I believe that the study of the preferred route has grossly underestimated the costs.

I wish to concentrate on a particular point rather than the general case which I have already expounded at some length. I am very worried about the impact of this whole affair on my constituents—for example, in terms of the valuations placed on properties bought under blight notice. If the value is disputed, the individual can reject it only by going to the Lands Tribunal, which is a very expensive business. If the matter is not resolved in the individual's favour, he will have to bear very heavy costs which are likely to far outweigh any improvement in the terms that he might get. Such a bias against being able to appeal against false valuations is very unfortunate.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Although my right hon. Friend's constituents and my constituents have very different views on the route, which we do not have time to discuss in detail this evening, perhaps my right hon. Friend will accept that we agree on one issue, which is that public money should be spent on compensating the affected constituents rather than on remunerating lawyers for interminable public inquiries.

Sir Terence Higgins: I agree with my hon. Friend, who is also worried about his constituents who will be affected by the road, that compensation is important. Although we improved the matter in 1991, compensation is still inadequate.

In a sense, what I am about to say goes against the main case that I am making, but what worries me in particular is the way in which the Department has declined to buy property which is just off the proposed preferred route. Clearly, as properties are bought, the number of protesters against the preferred route may diminish, but I nevertheless believe that the Department has adopted a very harsh attitude to the buying of property very near the preferred route from people who wish to move for many reasons, ranging from medical problems, a change of job or even a divorce.

The Minister has tended to say that the Department will consider only properties that are within 100 m of the centre line of the road which, in some cases, may be four lanes or more wide. That is far too close. Perhaps the Minister can explain how the figure of 100 m was reached, because, in view of the noise and chaos likely to be caused by the road works, such property is likely to be seriously affected even during construction.

Frankly, it is wholly unrealistic for my hon. Friend to say, as he has in his many letters to me about several cases that I have raised with him, that if people live more than 100 m from the centre of a four-lane road, their enjoyment of their home will not be significantly affected. I do not think that that argument can be sustained, and I feel that my hon. Friend the Minister should take a more sympathetic attitude.

Of course, the number of such cases is now diminishing; as I said earlier, a decision is likely within the next 18 months or two years, and, if the project goes ahead, the road will not be built for a further two or two and a half years.

Let me select an example at random. In a letter, my hon. Friend the Minister has stated:

"The decision on whether the enjoyment of a property is seriously affected by a road scheme is a matter entirely for the Department's discretion based on the facts of each case. As you know, as a guideline we have said that we would normally expect qualifying properties to be within about 100 metres from the centre line of the proposed road."

In my view, that gives far too much discretion—with no right of appeal—to people who may have important reasons for feeling that they must sell their properties, and are clearly unable to do so in the present circumstances. I hope that my hon. Friend will take a more sympathetic line on the outstanding cases than the line that he has adopted in the past.

My hon. Friend has suggested that certain people—in particular, members of the the British Legion—can be moved to temporary accommodation while the road is being built. That does not take account of the type of person, or the age groups, involved in this case.

I hope that my hon. Friend can tell us more about the timing, and, more particularly, about the basis on which he adopted the 100 m criterion—which, as I have said, I consider entirely wrong. I also hope that he will take a

more sympathetic attitude. People who would like to remain in their homes because they believe, as I do, that the bypass will eventually be built and that the preferred route will not go ahead feel that they are being driven out of their homes, because many of the rented properties have been occupied by people who have proved extremely unsatisfactory and unpleasant tenants. They feel that they are being driven out for the reason that I have mentioned: I believe that there will eventually be a bypass, and I shall continue to do everything I can to bring that about.

10.27 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): It is a great honour to reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). I am delighted that he has secured this debate: he has been an admirable debater and fighter for his constituency, and this is the third Adjournment debate that he has secured on the subject of the bypass.

My right hon. Friend mentioned his athletic ability. He has also shown great endurance in his campaign. I know that, in his youth, he was a well-known sprinter; it is interesting to note that, as he has entered middle age, he has turned into a runner of marathons. However, he has always been determined to represent his constituents, and has put their views unflinchingly.

I understand the problems faced by many of my right hon. Friend's constituents. Difficulty, uncertainty and discussion are always involved when a road is planned to run through a community, or close to where people live. None the less, I believe that our procedures for road building offer the public considerable opportunities to present their views: in that respect, I think that we are one of the most generous countries in the world.

As we know, a road programme must first be subjected to public consultation, as this has been. Draft orders are then published and exhibited, and the next stage is a public inquiry. Throughout those procedures, my officials and I —and my predecessor as Minister—have tried to be as helpful as possible; I know that my right hon. Friend accepts that. I have always been grateful for the courtesy with which he has pressed his point, despite his having done so with great vigour.

My right hon. Friend asked about the public inquiry, and I am glad to be able to announce that it will start at 10 am on Tuesday 28 September at the Assembly hall, Stoke Abbott road, Worthing, and will move to the Ardington hotel, Steyne Gardens, on Tuesday 19 October. The inquiry will be conducted by Mr. P. J. Leveridge, an independent inspector appointed by the Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment, on the nomination of the Lord Chancellor. The public inquiry will give everyone in Worthing and outside the chance to argue a case, and I know that my right hon. Friend has a formidable array of facts, figures and calculations to put to the inquiry.

We all accept the need to improve the A27. It is an important major route along the south coast to Chichester and beyond. The road will become a dual carriageway and be brought up to modern standards. It is not the need for the road that is at issue, but the route that it is to take. I know that my right hon. Friend wants an alternative to the north but, as he knows, such a route would not be without difficulty, as it would go through the downs, and it, too, would be opposed by many people, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen). We must all agree that, if nothing were done, conditions in Worthing would deteriorate even further, and would become intolerable.

My right hon. Friend knows the route well, so there is no need for me to describe it in detail. He can present his case to the public inquiry, but I assure him that we shall take great care to design the road as sympathetically as possible. The scheme involves two tunnels, which is pretty remarkable. The first, a bored tunnel through Lancing ring, will be about 580 m long. The other, of similar length, will be a cut-and-cover tunnel where the route passes through the north of Worthing, in the High Salvington area. The tunnels will provide significant benefits for the environment of the new road.

Furthermore, we shall use porous asphalt to build the road. That is a remarkable new surface that seems to halve traffic noise, and we now want to use it, whenever suitable, where roads go through towns and other places where people live. We shall also erect extensive amenity barriers and earth mounding. I know that it is important to maintain access to the downs for the people of Worthing, and we intend to do that, too, as far as possible.

My right hon. Friend talked about his worries about disruption during the construction of the road. I know that that is a continuing concern, which he has raised on several occasions, and I can tell him that extensive traffic management measures will be employed to minimise disruption to traffic. The provision of a temporary highway to the north of the existing A27 Arundel road while a tunnel through High Salvington is constructed will ensure that traffic continues to flow through the area. We shall also ensure that access in the area is maintained at all times.

Sir Terence Higgins: My hon. Friend mentioned that idea in a letter, and I was puzzled, because the only route that could be taken north of the A27 in the area that he mentioned passes bang through the middle of a cemetery.

Mr. Carlisle: I understand that such an alternative can be provided, and if my right hon. Friend and I can get together with a map of Worthing, I should like to point it out to him. Obviously we shall consult local people.

During construction we shall impose strict controls on the contractor to ensure that noise levels agreed with the local environmental health officer are adhered to. There will also be measures to suppress dust wherever that is necessary. We shall make a considerable effort to look after the scheme during construction. We are also keen to maintain proper pedestrian facilities. We are discussing with all the local authorities the provision of adequate pedestrian facilities, particularly in the Offington corner area.

The provision of a tunnel through the High Salvington area will improve access to the north and south of the A27, as the new local road above the tunnel will be much easier to cross than the existing road. As traffic increases on the existing road, it becomes more difficult to cross. So it is to be welcomed that in that area of Worthing, through traffic, which is the vast majority, will be taken through the area in a tunnel.

My right hon. Friend has always been concerned about the effect of the road on individuals. Indeed, the way in which it would affect his constituents has been the main

[Mr. Carlisle]

thrust of his letters to me. He has always sought to put their case and to get proper recognition of their problems. I salute his efforts in that respect.

I appreciate that, understandably, he wants generous compensation to be paid, and my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham supports him in that desire. We are constrained by legislation, and the provisions that we make for compensation have been increased substantially in recent years. It may be helpful if I take my right hon. Friend through what is available and answer some of his questions.

There is, first, statutory blight. If a property is to be physically affected by, or is required for, a scheme, the owner can serve a blight notice and have his house purchased at full market value plus 10 per cent. My right hon. Friend was more concerned about those who were or were not favoured by the new discretionary purchase arrangements which came into operation in 1991. There was at that time a considerable extension of our powers and help that we could give to people affected by road schemes.

It is a discretion, and of course someone must always exercise it. It is our duty to exercise it not only with the good of the public in mind but with proper provision for the public purse. So we must seek to find a balance, which is what we have tried to do. Before it can be applied, it must be shown that there is a serious effort on the property, and noise is generally taken as the most common nuisance factor. So in making a decision we look first at the question of noise.

My right hon. Friend questioned whether we should go beyond 100 m. We take 100 m as a guideline because we believe that, within that area, a house is most severely affected. Beyond 100 m, a house becomes increasingly better protected from a new road. But we still examine cases beyond 100 m. If they meet the more rigorous criteria that we apply beyond 100 m, we are happy to use our discretionary powers, and we do so on certain occasions. So we have some discretion.

Beyond the statutory blight and discretionary powers, we have our section 246 powers which come into effect while the works are in progress and for a year after they have been completed. They are also blight-related, and the powers, and compensation that we can give, take effect when the works begin. If matters were absolutely intolerable for any of my right hon. Friend's constituents while the works were in progress, we would examine those provisions to see whether they would apply.

There is then compensation after the work has been done. If, for a year after the work has been completed, it is believed that the value of the property has declined, the owner can apply for compensation for loss of value. That would, of course, apply after the road had been built.

Finally, noise insulation measures will apply, and my right hon. Friend's constituents can seek them in the ordinary way.

Our aim is to apply this range of measures as sympathetically as possible; to try to do that efficiently and fairly to meet all genuine claims—always on the understanding that we do so with integrity. I know that we will not always be able to please my right hon. Friend or his constituents, but we will do our level best to deal with each case as expeditiously and carefully as possible.

Lastly, my right hon. Friend asked about the timetable for the road. If all goes well with the statutory procedures, we may be able to start building in the autumn of 1995, and construction would take about two years. It is an ambitious programme, and technically difficult—with two bridges and the route through parts of Worthing, if the public inquiry allows that.

This is a much-needed road. I know full well that my right hon. Friend will put his case for his constituency at the public inquiry with great intelligence, integrity and perception. Who knows what his advocacy might achieve? Meanwhile, I thank him, and I hope that he will keep in touch with me about all the difficult aspects of this road over the next few months.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 21 May 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

British Rail Pensioners

9.34 am

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I wish to present a petition from thousands of British Rail pensioners and deferred pensioners from all parts of the country who have seen the Government's options in the rail privatisation Bill and have rejected those options. They suggest another option to the House that will protect them in the future from Maxwell-style plundering by any party, including Her Majesty's Government.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House ensure that the Railways Bill be so amended as to guarantee that the resources of the British Rail Pension Fund are the property of the pensioners and of the contributors to the fund.

And your Petitioners, as duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Points of Order

9.35 am

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today's newspapers carry reports of a press conference called yesterday by the Secretary of State for Transport at which he announced the Government's abandonment of their proposed takeover of part of the British Rail pension fund.

As existing British Rail pensioners and, indeed, employees of British Rail regard such a takeover as common theft on the part of the Government, and as you, Madam Speaker, have deprecated important statements on Government policy being made for the first time outside the confines of the House, is there anything that you can do to ask the Secretary of State for Transport to come to the Dispatch Box this morning and make the House privy to the Government's considerations with regard to the British Rail pensions fund which have caused enormous anxiety to pensioners and employees?

Madam Speaker: Perhaps I might draw the hon. Lady's attention to a question that was answered yesterday. It appears in column *237* of *Hansard* and relates directly to railway pensions. The Minister made a statement in that form.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the reports on the radio and television this morning of Judge Stephen Tumim's conclusions on the appalling conditions in Cardiff prison, have you had any request from the Government to make a statement on the matter this morning?

Madam Speaker: I must inform the hon. Gentleman that no Minister has let me know that he wishes to make a statement this morning on that matter.

Exporters (Government Support)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

9.37 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am grateful for the opportunity to explain what the Government are doing to help the United Kingdom to win in world markets. Exports are crucial to our economic well-being. Our export performance has been impressive. I intend to tell the House how the Government plan to build on that success. We lead by example. Ministers are not sitting on their backsides basking in the glow of our current good export performance—and it is good. We are constantly helping industry to do battle with the competition by, among other things, visiting overseas markets with business men.

In 10 days my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade will travel to the far east with 25 British business representatives to fight for Britain in the world's fastest growing market. Department of Trade and Industry Ministers come with knowledge of industry. They have worked and succeeded in business. We know what industrialists and business men require and we are determined to deliver.

Since April last year, as Under-Secretary of State for Technology, I have visited nine overseas markets. My ministerial colleagues in the DTI are planning to lead at least 14 trade missions to some 17 countries in the forthcoming year, covering markets as diverse as Kazakhstan, Colombia and Korea. Much good business flows from such activity.

I shall give some examples of the value of such visits. On my last trip to Latin America I was struck by the huge potential for our consultancy and banking sectors to help countries to take forward their privatisation programme. In both Argentina and Paraguay, where President Rodriguez personally stressed to me his commitment to the importance of privatisation, I plugged the United Kingdom's unrivalled expertise in that sphere. It is now up to United Kingdom business to fight for its share, and I have no doubt that it will come out winning. The Opposition may not like that, but we have a worldwide record in successfully introducing privatisation. As a result, our companies are winning in the world markets. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), an Opposition Whip, keeps making quiet sedentary remarks—if he wishes to come to the Dispatch Box to comment on our export performance, I am sure that the House will be delighted to listen to him. If not, I shall continue to describe what the Government are doing to ensure that this country wins in world markets.

In India I was impressed with the efforts being made to throw off decades of socialist dogma in an attempt to reap the benefits of a free market. India offers an increasingly attractive proposition for United Kingdom business, on whose behalf I lobbied extensively. With one sixth of the world's population and, as a Unilever representative said to me, one third of the world's hair, India is a market which no United Kingdom company with global pretensions can ignore. The Prime Minister recognised that and took a high-level delegation of business people there earlier this year. During the trip, GEC Alsthom landed a £140 million order and British Gas signed up for a 35 per cent. stake in a £100 million joint venture to supply gas to Bombay.

Another market that I have visited recently is Ghana—our second largest market in sub-Saharan Africa. The United Kingdom is responsible for nearly 30 per cent. of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development exports to Ghana, but we can and will do better. The business representatives who accompanied me are writing a report on the prospects for increased trade and investment which I intend to launch at a major conference in London in July.

In the past year, my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has visited China no fewer than three times, as well as Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Belgium. He has done all that, and still managed to remain in the good books of my hon. Friends in the Whips Office. Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry are committed to improving the United Kingdom's export performances, as are all our ambassadors overseas. The potential overseas is enormous—in our traditional markets in Europe and north America and in the dynamic thrusting economies of the Pacific rim, including China. The opening up of that market and the move towards a market-led rather than a state-planned approach will offer enormous export opportunities in the next decade.

Industry has followed my hon. Friend the Minister's lead. We doubled our exports to China in the first two months of this year, on top of a significant increase last year. Industry and Government have to roll up their sleeves, get stuck in and fight, as partners, for business. In such difficult and potentially lucrative markets, we have to do better than our competitors. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has visited China three times in the past year, and is going there again soon.

Our export infrastructure is sound. Export performance is excellent and getting better. There are many success stories. The economic outlook is much more promising. All the ingredients are there for export-led growth. I do not want to bore the House with statistics, but shall quote a few to illustrate my point. In 1992, visible export earnings were £108 billion—3 per cent. up on 1991's record figures. In 1992, invisible earnings stood at £108 billion, second only to the United States of America.

In the past three years, the volume of United Kingdom manufacturing exports has risen faster than that of Germany or Japan. In the first quarter of 1993, visible exports to non-EC markets were up 12 per cent. in volume terms over the same period in 1992. I think that my hon. Friends will agree that those figures are not too bad. Despite all the doom and gloom that we hear from the Labour party, the figures show that this country is winning.

After three decades of decline, our volume share of world trade has now stabilised. I could go on, but the House will have got the message. The important issue is how to build on that success. As well as the economic environment, we want the trading environment to be right. We have simplified the tax regime, cut corporation tax by one third, and reduced the tax burden on business by £1 billion in this year's Budget. We have given a high priority to reducing the burdens on business.

We have worked hard to achieve a sensible world trading system. We have worked with the European Commission, other EC countries and the other key players

in the Uruguay round. We have used our recent presidency of the EC to press forward with the completion of the single market. We remain committed to encouraging free trade wherever possible. We like to feel that this country leads the movement towards world free trade.

We have also been looking at the way in which we provide support to exporters. With the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, we provide a comprehensive package of support to United Kingdom exporters through overseas trade services. We have more than 2,000 staff in the United Kingdom and overseas. We provide support from basic market research through to supporting 7,000 companies in major trade fairs overseas each year. We provide advice to exporters, small and large, on opportunities world wide. We work with large companies on major projects overseas—if we cannot help, we know a man who can. We have been working since 1989 to make overselves more customer-driven and, with the excellent work undertaken by Foreign Office staff in nearly 200 posts overseas, we have succeeded.

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of the services we provide. That is not our perception; it is what the market tells us. Demand for our charged information services has quadrupled since 1989. Independent research tells us that 90 per cent. of customers say that they would use our services again. However, we cannot be complacent. Our market research has also indentified some weaknesses. We take too long to provide some services—always a criticism of government—so we are working hard to improve where necessary.

Our export promotion effort is constantly evolving to meet the new challenges that we face. I shall tell the House about the specific action that we already have in hand. My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade outlined in a speech to the Institute of Export last November how our commercial export strategy would work. Our aim is to maximise our strengths and minimise our weaknesses. The key is partnership between the Government and industry. We must ensure that Government support to exporters is efficient and industry's response effective. At a national level, we must match the Department's organisation to business needs.

That strategy provided the framework for the fundamental restructuring of my Department's export services announced by the President of the Board of Trade last week. Our objective is to sharpen the focus of our export promotion effort. Changes include the appointment of the new director general of export promotion, the allocation of up to 60 more staff to help and the establishment of two export promotion divisions. The new divisions will develop our capabilities and expertise. They will also draw up strategies for each of our top 80 export markets.

Those new divisions will also work closely with the 100 export promoters being seconded from the private sector. Some 30 secondees are now in place. My colleagues and I have been impressed with the calibre of those that industry has sent us. DTI Ministers recently had a meeting with the secondees, and their quality and enthusiasm were striking. That just shows the value of Departments having an infusion of new blood from the private sector. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is determined increasingly to put the DTI alongside industry and that there should be continuous crossovers of staff between the private sector and the DTI. In that way, the DTI will become more responsive to industry's needs.

We believe that the initiative of promoting industrial secondees as export promoters is an excellent idea. We hope to have about 100 of them by December, and we hope that as new people arrive they will bring with them fresh contacts. They will also have, and will gradually acquire, more expertise in their target markets, and that in turn will enable them to spot new export opportunities and to encourage companies to exploit them.

This reorganisation follows hard on the heels of four other notable changes which further benefit United Kingdom exporters. In addition to the £700 million announced last autumn, the Chancellor has announced that a further £1·3 billion of cover for key export markets over the next three years will be given. Premium rates have also been cut again to about the average charged by our principal competitors.

This has been a considerable achievement for the President of the Board of Trade. I have been a DTI Minister for two and a half years, and I know that there have been many complaints about the degree of our support for the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Now the President has come out fighting for it. In difficult economic circumstances, and in a tight spending round, he has managed to persuade Treasury colleagues to grant an extra £2 billion to the ECGD, and that is a tribute to my right hon. Friend. We have now ensured that the ECGD is competitive across the world. We can never ensure that it will match the best rates in any one market. For instance, in south America it may be difficult to match the high levels of support provided by the Americans, but, thanks to the hard work of my right hon. Friend and his commitment to exporters, we have ensured that the ECGD is competitive. I am sure that my hon. Friends attending this debate welcome that.

Our support does not end there. We are responsive to industry's needs. We have also provided $500 million of ECGD cover as part of the international package for the former Soviet Union. No doubt that will please one of our new export promoters, Nigel Peters, who tells us:

"The potential in Kazakhstan is enormous in a market which will be one of the star performers of the 21st century".

That is why we are planning a ministerial-led business mission to Kazakhstan.

We have also just reorganised the Overseas Projects Board into new sector groups covering our main capital goods exports. These groups will be headed by leading business people and they will encourage United Kingdom companies to work together more efficiently in pursuit of major project contracts. We aim to double existing sales to non-OECD markets by the end of the decade—quite an aim. Whether we will meet the target I do not know, but we will fight hard to do so.

We have also launched a series of major campaigns aimed at our three largest markets—Europe, north America and Japan. We have created the Whitehall export promotion committee, which will ensure that a constant approach to export support is adopted across Government Departments.

The President's attitude to create a national network of one-stop shops will also assist our export performance. He is wholly committed to the initiative, which will in the end create as many as 200 one-stop shops, dramatically improving the Government's ability to deliver key services to business throughout the country. The initiative will

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

significantly increase awareness of overseas opportunities and provide access to export services locally, be it in Bury, Bolton or Lincoln.

The first one-stop shops will open in the next few months. They will be instrumental in driving home the message that all businesses should consider the opportunities that exporting offers. One-stop shops will fill a large gap in our business support structure.

We believe that we now have the right structure in place. The recent announcement is the final piece in the jigsaw. Our organisation is now a valuable mix of public and private sector skills. To be successful in Government we must have a partnership between the private and public sectors. Ministers also have access to the valuable advice of the chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, Sir Derek Hornby, and of the 200 business men and women who sit on the board and its area advisory groups.

While we have been refining our strategy and structure and scouring the world for business opportunities in the past year, what has the Labour party been doing? It has launched an industry campaign which failed to pay serious attention to the economic importance of exporting. For once, showing good judgment, the party promptly recommended that we make all the changes that we already had. Phrases about horses and stable doors come to mind.

The Labour party said that we should

"provide a new analysis of the problems that are holding Britain back".

That is an interesting suggestion, and it is why we set up our industrial competitiveness division immediately after the last election. Labour said that we should

"offer a new partnership between Government and industry".

Where has the Labour party been for the past 12 months? My ministerial colleagues and I will soon be accused of not leaving British companies alone long enough to let them get on with their real work. The President is well known for his open door to industry, and the same can be said of my other ministerial colleagues. My right hon. Friend has ensured that the Department is being reorganised to provide an effective voice in Whitehall.

Yet another new idea from the Labour party is that we should set about identifying the export markets of tomorrow——

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am not sure why the Minister is wasting the time of the House with this part of his speech, unless he intends to propose a toast to absent friends.

Mr. Leigh: That is a good comment. A Labour Front-Bench spokesman has managed to be with us today, impressively enough, but I can see an ocean of empty space behind him. Behind me, by contrast, are a number of my hon. Friends who are waiting to speak. *Hansard* will show the interest that Conservative Members take in exports.

As I was saying, the Labour party had an idea that we should set about identifying the export markets of tomorrow—just what we have been doing since 1990. Our 100 export promoters will continue to advance this work.

All this invokes a sense of deja vu. It reminds me of one of Labour's manifesto pledges last year, when it promised to create a

"revitalised and integrated export service, combining the trade functions of the DTI, Foreign Office and the British Overseas Trade Board".

That pledge brings Labour's familiarity with Whitehall into question. We had already set up the DTI/FCO joint directorate to co-ordinate the Government's export promotion programme 12 months earlier. Labour will be advocating votes for women next!

The Labour party says that other countries will steam ahead and leave us behind. The Opposition do not seem to recognise that we are foremost in forging links with our competitors, and we shall be up there with the best of them, if not in the lead, in everything from outward investment, inward investment, strategic alliances and technology transfer to joint ventures. Our policy speaks for itself: the Government have responded to the internationalisation of trade like no other nation.

Of course, creating the right environment and restructuring our export support structure would be no good if companies could not run with the exporting baton. Ultimately, it is the creative flair, energy, commitment and dynamic entrepreneurial skills of British business that will succeed. Our flair for international trading must be reinforced by new generations of industrialists and business men.

I am continually reassured by the success stories of British industry which cross my desk or which I come across in my travels. The President told me of a visit he had made to Vosper Thornycroft on Monday of this week. He was struck by its successful turnround since the management buy-out in 1985, despite the difficulties created by a combination of defence cuts and the recession. The company's outstanding export record since privatisation and the speed at which it has diversified into new market sectors must represent one of the most remarkable industrial success stories of recent years.

Some 118 exporters were awarded the Queen's award for export achievement in 1993. We received 1,582 applications for export and technology awards, the highest for many years. The export winners represent success stories across the industrial spectrum. They range from breadcrumb, cream liqueur and pizza-base manufacturers to a company that developed an automatic cattle dewormer and, for the first time, an entire orchestra.

Since its formation in 1959, the orchestra of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Britain's only non-subsidised orchestra, has made more than 1,000 recordings, including the sound track of the successful film "Amadeus". From a pig improvement company in Abingdon, genetically superior master pigs fly the world, improving breeding stock in markets as diverse as the United States, the Ukraine and Cuba.

All those are examples of the ingenuity and skill which add value to our efforts to improve export performance. I shall give a few other recent examples. North-West Water and Severn Trent Water each won contracts worth more than $350 million to provide water and waste services to a number of municipalities in Mexico City. An international consortium, including the United Kingdom arm of Bechtel, has won a $1·4 billion turnkey project to develop Abu Dhabi's onshore gas production. The project will employ 425 people in Hammersmith and will be worth £200 million to £250 million to the United Kingdom in engineering services and equipment purchases.

As an example of the partnership with industry, Bechtel is making a presentation in our offices next week to

publicise this excellent opportunity for United Kingdom industry. Not surprisingly, the presentation is vastly oversubscribed. Our intention is to build on this success. We already export a quarter of what we produce, and per head of population we export more than the United States or even Japan.

As I have said, export volumes have been going up, even over the past few years. Many of our firms are benefiting from a competitive exchange rate, and we are exporting leading edge goods in aerospace, pharmaceutical, electronics and other industries. Let no one say that nobody wants to buy our goods. It is a little perceived fact that on capital goods—often the most sophisticated—we have a favourable balance with the rest of the world.

We shall continue to develop new initiatives. We are not complacent: we know the challenges facing us. We have devised a thorough-going export strategy and we intend to embed it throughout the trading base of the United Kingdom at local and national levels and within government. We have the structure right and we are using the recent changes to galvanise industry interest in the enormous overseas opportunities.

As I have demonstrated, our intention is to lead this export drive with vigour and enthusiasm. The partnership between industry and the Government must succeed, and it will.

10.2 am

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I congratulate the Government on allowing time to debate this important issue. It enables us to draw attention to crucial facts about Britain's balance of payments. It is interesting that the Government should wish to devote time to discussing that, because the Chancellor predicted that the deficit would be £17 billion in 1993 and the Oxford economic forecasting group has suggested that, by 1995, the deficit will be more than £20 billion.

The Minister rightly emphasised the importance of exports, but we must look at both sides of the equation by examining the increase in imports. I shall illustrate the problem in relation to manufactured imports over the past decade. The figures that I shall quote are all contained in parliamentary answers by the Minister. The value of manufactured goods from Taiwan increased from £211 million in 1979 to £1,250 million in 1991, an increase of 492 per cent. Japanese manufactured goods imported into the United Kingdom rose from £1,441 million in 1979 to £6,655 million in 1991, an increase of 362 per cent. South Korean manufactured goods increased from £265 million in 1979 to £905 million in 1991, an increase of 254 per cent.

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): Does not that show the benefits to the British consumer of a much higher standard of living and the advantage of cheap electronic goods from the countries that the hon. Gentleman mentions? It is an old-fashioned view to say that we must manufacture everything ourselves.

Mr. Fatchett: It may be an old-fashioned view, but I am a realist and I should like to see Britain manufacturing a more substantial proportion of the goods that we consume. This country cannot run a £17 billion trade deficit with an expectation that it will increase. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has a passing knowledge of economics which is sufficient to enable him to understand that that will again lead to an increase in interest rates.

Mr. Roger Evans *rose*——

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman is hyperactive. He should restrain himself. He has obviously waited a whole week for this debate, so I shall give way to him once more.

Mr. Evans: What is the point of the hon. Gentleman's figures? He should realise that there is a £30 billion unaccounted item in the published figures for the balance of payments. The balance of payment figures for all the leading countries simply do not add up. This is old-fashioned economic analysis and is totally exploded.

Mr. Fatchett: Given the hon. Gentleman's figures, he was notably in charge of the Maxwell pension fund. To the City and other financial sectors, a £17 billion trade deficit is not looked upon approvingly.

I shall quote some more figures to put the issue in perspective. The United Kingdom's trade deficit in manufactured goods with the rest of the OECD has more than doubled over the past decade from £3,948 million in 1979 to £10,146 million in 1991. Our trade deficit in manufactured goods with the United States has quadrupled from £535 million in 1979 to £2,328 million in 1991. We have a manufactured goods deficit of £4,726 with Japan, £3,920 million with Germany, and £1,651 million with Switzerland.

This country did not have a manufactures trade deficit until 1982, but it has had one in every subsequent year and there is now only one continent with which Britain has a manufactures trade surplus, and that is Africa. The Government are right to draw attention to our overal trade performance, but it is something of an own goal that they should devote time to a debate on the balance of payments deficit.

The previous Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher, used to lecture us about our need to pay our way in the world. There may have been an element of Yorkshire thrift in the speech by the Minister, who is from Lincolnshire. Baroness Thatcher said that no country can continue to have a deficit of this sort and try to maintain living standards. The pressure of that trade deficit will cause a series of economic problems. It has to be financed and that may be done through higher interest rates. That may push up the value of the pound to a level that is unhealthy for Britain's exports and we shall be again in a downward spiral rather than an upward virtuous one.

I have a statistical point in relation to the Minister's speech. I am delighted with the success of British exporters. The Minister was kind enough to refer to the Labour party's industrial policy document, a document that was warmly received throughout the industry and which showed that the Labour party understands the problems faced by Britain's industrial sector. The Minister quoted from it Labour's support for exporters and our suggestions for further policy developments. He can look forward to a further series of documents, which will show that the Labour party is creating a new partnership with British industry, understands its needs and is looking forward to bringing that partnership into practice when in government.

One figure that the Minister used showed that Britain exports more per head of population than the United States or Japan. The Prime Minister has also quoted those figures and the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) has read the central office brief and come up with the same ones. That is reassuring. I always enjoy the

[Mr. Fatchett]

discipline in the Conservative party which comes from the use of central office briefs. That may have been shattered over the past few months and there may be slightly less discipline, but Tory Members are still able to learn a small number of facts. Perhaps what has coloured the Government's education policies is the Tory party's approach—if one can learn one or two facts and repeat them, one has all the ability that is needed to become a Tory Back Bencher.

That figure comparing exports per head with those in the United States and Japan is accurate, but has to be taken in context. Perhaps I can help the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire to flesh out his brief from Conservative central office and perhaps I can help the Minister as well. In 1979, the United Kingdom also exported more per capita than Japan or the United States. I have taken from various figures a list of 25 countries with which to compare Britain's performance on invisible exports between 1979 and 1992.

After 13 years of Conservative Government, in which we have been through a series of economic miracles, with occasional mishaps on the way, our position in the league table has not changed. One or two of the countries below us, and thus one or two of the countries above us, have changed, but Britain remains in the same position. On my league table, we are seventh from bottom, or, if the Minister would like it more positively, 18th from the top.

Let me give a flavour of the countries that do better in exports per capita. They include Singapore and Hong Kong and, in Europe, they include Holland, Belgium, Norway, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Austria, Germany and France. That interesting league table is not in the central office brief, but it is useful in making valid comparisons with other countries.

I welcome the debate and I shall spend some time talking about imports, but I shall first pick up some of the points that the Minister made. I welcome the emphasis on exports because it shows one thing above all else. After 13 years, after some fashionable economics in the mid-1980s, the Government have at last recognised the importance of manufacturing industry.

The Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household (Mr. Sydney Chapman): That is a year out of date.

Mr. Fatchett: I realise that keeping quiet for a whole week is difficult for the Whip and that he feels that he has to tell us that, after 13 years in office, the Government recognised the importance of manufacturing industry a year ago. That is encouraging, but I suspect that it may take a little time to persuade manufacturing employers and companies that they have a true friend and a real partner in the Government. The simple fact is that many Conservative Members subscribed to the fashionable theory in the mid-1980s that Britain's future was to be found in the service sector, in no-technology, low-technology industry. That theory came from both No. 10 and No. 11 Downing street when the then Chancellor, now Lord Lawson, and the then Prime Minister, now Lady Thatcher, were still talking to each other.

What is crucial and what is easily understood by most people is that if we are to export, manufactured goods rather than services are what we will export. It would be foolish of me to say that we do not export some services, because clearly we do, but overwhelmingly we export manufactured goods. That further underpins the importance of the manufacturing sector. It makes the point that the Labour party made in its industrial strategy document: that the country needs an industrial strategy and a Government who understand its industrial base and give it priority.

Two nights ago, we had a debate about Britain's defence companies—companies which have a proud record on exports and a substantial investment in skills and research and development. Such companies rely on the Government's procurement policies for their United Kingdom market and on exports. That is a clear relationship. An important element of the defence industry is shipbuilding and my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), the Deputy Chief Whip, knows the shipbuilding industry better than anybody.

My hon. Friend knows also that the European Community figures on shipbuilding and the potential for growth in shipbuilding orders predict a 100 per cent. growth in orders for new ships over the next decade. Despite that potential for growth, our industrial base—our ability to meet those new orders—is being reduced. Thus, we have the tragic situation of Swan Hunter, where substantial numbers of highly skilled workers who deal with sophisticated technology are this morning facing the prospect of job losses.

I can imagine us, in a few years' time, having a debate similar to this. Whichever party is in office, we shall be saying that opportunities in shipbuilding have been lost to the United Kingdom because our capacity to compete has disappeared as a result of the reckless decisions taken in the early 1990s. That is the link between industrial strategy and exports and the shipbuilding industry is a good example.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that the shipbuilding industry of the north-east, Jarrow and other parts of the United Kingdom should adopt the same wage rates as those in Korea?

Mr. Fatchett: I am not sure how anybody could have come to such a conclusion, but it is good to see a fertile and active mind at work, even though there is no logical basis for what the hon. Gentleman said. Of course, I am not saying that. Shipbuilding capacity has decreased more quickly and more sharply in the United Kingdom than in any other European Community country. That is true in terms of tonnage, capacity and employment. One reason for that is that the Government have given no consideration to the plight of Britain's shipyards, which have built for the military for many years.

Those warship yards could have been converted to civilian yards. They could have had access to intervention funds from Brussels so that extra would have been made available to help them. Swan Hunter could have competed for that growth in civilian orders. Instead, the Government were obsessed with privatisation. The Minister wanted to sell privatisation to the world. That obsession led them to sell Britain's shipbuilding history and future for their ideological purposes. They did it without giving British shipyards access to the intervention funds. They agreed that with the Commission. They sold our history and future at that point. We are talking of reckless Ministers and a reckless Government, which is why we demand that,

when we discuss exports, we link the discussion to our manufacturing and industrial base. The future must be linked on that basis.

The Minister talked about the improvement in Britain's export figures in recent months. There may be a simple reason for that. Britain's currency has been devalued and that has given our exporters a competitive edge. How many Conservative Members present today advocated devaluation as an export strategy before devaluation took place in September? I will give way to any Conservative Member who did not go along with the Prime Minister when he said in September that devaluation was fool's gold. Who of them will rise and say bravely that he or she, before September 1992, argued for devaluation, the real cause of the medium to short-term growth in Britain's exports?

It is good to see British companies taking advantage of that, but I await the comments of the brave Conservative Members, the people of principle, who are willing to take up my offer. I hear the Minister coughing. That is probably the most appropriate reaction in his case because I will let the House into a secret. I suspect that in private he is called a Eurosceptic.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he and his hon. Friends were even more enthusiastic than were Conservative Members for joining the exchange rate mechanism in the first place?

Mr. Fatchett: That was not the most passionate defence of the Minister or the position taken by Conservative Members before September.

Mr. Stephen: Answer my question.

Mr. Fatchett: It is easily answered. The shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry were making statements from the early spring of last year to the effect that Britain should favour a general realignment within the ERM. The Labour party's position has been clear on the issue. The Government were arguing that any form of devaluation was fool's gold.

I shall willingly give way to the Minister if he wishes to say whether he believes that returning to the ERM would be advantageous for Britain's exporters. It seems that he does not intend to respond. Will any other Conservative Member defend the position? As I say, the immediate short-term increase in exports has been largely due to the fact that Britain devalued, giving us a competitive currency rate.

I must move on because it is clear that the Minister is not keen to enter the debate about the ERM—*[Interruption.]* I gather from the Minister's demeanour that he may comment on the matter when he replies to the debate. We look forward to his comments on the virtues of the ERM and our future membership of it, from the point of view of Britain's exporters.

My hon. Friends and I are pleased to see extra money being made available for export credit guarantees. But the Minister will be aware of our concern lest some short-term risks are not fully covered. That could damage Britain's exporters, an argument which is adduced not just by the Labour party but by the CBI and many British companies. I hope that the Minister will relate his remarks to those short-term risks and our ability to cover them.

The CBI welcomes the Governments' comment that Foreign and Commonwealth Office expertise will be used more effectively to promote Britain's exports. I do not have a large sample of the efforts of Britain's embassies overseas in that respect. I appreciate that some hon. Members make it their business to visit as many British embassies as possible, presumably to help in the export drive and as part of the fact-finding process of being an hon. Member.

As I say, I have a small sample, but I congratulate the efforts made by our embassies on the exporting front, although I remain concerned over the CBI figures, which suggest that since 1989 there has been a cut in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget devoted to export promotion and similar commercial activities. The CBI fears that that reduction is likely to continue. If so, all the good intentions of the Department of Trade and Industry will not necessarily be reproduced in practical terms.

May we be assured that a clear dialogue is taking place between the DTI and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on those issues? May we also be assured that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not cutting its commercial and export promotion staff, a move which could be extremely damaging? Hon. Members in all parts of the House could suggest alternative ways by which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office could make more effective cuts in the interest of the United Kingdom economy.

The Minister omitted to refer to small businesses, an important area of growth in the British economy. The vast majority of small businesses are, by the nature of their services and products, not exporters. But an important group of small businesses, often engaged in high-tech activities, export a great deal. I am frequently told that, for a number of reasons, small businesses find it difficult to export; perhaps the Minister will comment on the issues involved. They say that they find it difficult to get through the DTI bureaucracy and to receive the support and services that they need. The Minister referred to the one-stop shop, a concept which is supported by all, but we must consider other ways to help small businesses to export. Their representatives have frequently floated to me the idea that it may be essential for the Government to pay more attention and provide more resources—I suspect that small sums are involved—to bringing small businesses into a relationship with larger organisations across sectors to help those small businesses get their products into export markets. They have in mind almost a mental relationship, as it were, across sectors.

The DTI may have considered the idea, but it needs examining in greater detail because we must encourage small businesses, particularly those in the high-tech sector, to export, thereby enabling them and the economy to grow. The risks that such small businesses face, by their nature and the capital involved, are great. They need support and it is more likely to come from the Government than from the banks and other commercial institutions.

I began my remarks by relating exports to our overall balance of payments. Crucial to today's debate is Britain's ability, through manufactured goods, to satisfy our domestic requirements. That relates to the balance of payments deficit and I cite some figures from a newspaper that is widely read and respected by Conservative Members. I have no doubt that the figures in *The Daily Telegraph* came from Government sources, so they can be regarded as authoritative in this context.

[Mr. Fatchett]

Neil Collins, City editor of *The Daily Telegraph* wrote an interesting article in which he examined the way in which Britain relies on imported goods. He referred to six products in which Britain is now more reliant on imports and the figures give a flavour of the problem. In 1971, 70 per cent. of Britain's machine tools were produced by British manufacturers, but by 1991 the figure had fallen to 40 per cent. Any hon. Member who visits a British factory will find that, sadly, more new machine tools in British factories are not produced in the United Kingdom. As I visit factories, I make it a regular practice to ask whether machines were made in the United Kingdom or whether there is a British equivalent. I am told that they had to go to Japan, Germany, Switzerland or Sweden. I do not believe that those senior managers are unpatriotic or are trying to sell Britain short. They would like to buy British, but Britain simply does not have the capacity.

I represent a Leeds constituency. In much of south Leeds, factories produced machine tools that became household names, but sadly they have now all disappeared. The Minister may say that I am old-fashioned, but no effective manufacturing and exporting country can compete and succeed without being able to produce its own machine tools. The figures that I have given show the extent to which that capacity has disappeared.

Mr. Stephen: I am sure that Conservative Members are as concerned as the hon. Gentleman about the serious decline in the British machine tool industry, but he offered no explanation of how that decline occurred and why. Could it, I wonder, have had anything to do with the strikes and restrictive practices that were so prevalent in British industry throughout the 1960s and 1970s and were encouraged by his hon. Friends in the Labour party?

Mr. Fatchett: An argument based on variables must be time-related. Unfortunately, the events to which the hon. Gentleman referred, even if they occurred and damaged industry as he suggests—that is a matter for argument—occurred earlier than the rundown in capacity, which happened mainly in the 1980s. I suggest that that decline had much to do with the Government's policies.

Over the same 20-year period, figures for domestic household products show that the production of fridges and freezers in Britain fell from 61 to 53 per cent. That is a less substantial decline than in the machine-tool industry, but it certainly is a decline. The production of washing machines fell from 82 to 49 per cent. The production of shoes fell from 69 to 30 per cent. The production of motor cycles—a subject that may take some hon. Members back to their youth—fell from 66 per cent. to only 4 per cent.—a total wipe-out of an industry. The clothing industry, which is dear to our hearts in Leeds because it was one of the most important clothing centres, has experienced a fall from 79 to 56 per cent. Those figures show the extent of the problem, to which the Minister did not refer and I can understand why.

In two weeks' time, I shall visit the Raleigh factory in Nottingham. It is a successful company, but the cycle industry is a classic example of the decline of a very important British industry. Of the 2·75 million bicycles that were sold in the United Kingdom in 1991, 58·2 per cent. were imported. There have been questions—I know that the Minister has been involved—about the nature of imports from various countries into the United Kingdom. I know that companies such as Raleigh are concerned about the nature of that trade in terms of dumping and the extent to which those imports are subsidised. Nevertheless, there has been a substantial collapse in Britain's ability to produce and to meet capacity. The *Daily Telegraph* also deals with what has happened to our glassware and cutlery industries, but I shall conclude with a further example from my constituency.

Mr. Fabricant: Could not the same litany of industries in which manufacturing has declined in the United Kingdom—and it undoubtedly has because of imports—be read out for the United States and Germany? The hon. Gentleman is talking about imports from former eastern bloc countries and the Pacific rim, where, as I said earlier, wage rates are substantially lower.

Mr. Fatchett: The simple answer to the hon. Gentleman is that a comparison does not reveal such a sharp decline. The crucial consideration is the collapse in the United Kingdom's manufacturing industry and the loss of jobs and capacity.

I shall give one further example that follows from my earlier point about the balance of payments and shows the extent to which Government policies link together and undermine our manufacturing base. Following privatisation of the bus industry in the mid-1980s, orders for new buses and coaches have declined considerably. At the same time, because of that pressure and the Government's economic recession, Britain's bus-building capacity has been reduced significantly. If, as we hope, we are coming out of recession, if, as we hope for our safety and comfort, Britain's coach and bus operators decide to buy more buses and coaches, and if demand for buses and coaches returns to the levels of the mid-1980s, we shall be able to supply only about two thirds of the demand of the mid-1980s. DAF, Volvo and others will fill the gap. We shall import again. Britain's industrial base is being undermined, our manufacturing industry cannot meet demand and we will therefore have to pull in more imports.

The Minister is right to talk about exports. Hon. Members agree that we need to increase exports and that we need policies designed to achieve that objective, but there are two sides to the equation and I have been dwelling on the second. I noticed that the press reported yesterday some disagreement within the Conservative party about contact with overseas business people, but I shall ignore those internal party difficulties about funding the Conservative party.

It is clear—this is where Conservative and Labour Members differ—that a country cannot maintain its standard of living if it is running a substantial balance of payments deficit. That is why we must emphasise both sides of the equation—exports and Britain's ability to provide for itself. I am not talking about import substitution in the sense of barriers or saying that Britain must impose import controls. I want British products that can succeed in the home market by being competitive, with British industry having the capacity to produce those goods

The Government did not consider that in their industrial strategy, with the clear consequence that our balance of payments deficit will pull us back again into

high interest rates, overvalued currency and further economic doom and gloom. Every downturn in the British economy since the 1960s, whatever party has been in office, has reduced our manufacturing capacity and increased the number of long-term unemployed people. We start from a higher point in terms of unemployment and a lower one in terms of capacity.

Not only imports but exports must be considered, because if any Government of either party are to provide the personal, social and public services that this country deserves as it enters the 21st century, they must confront its balance of payments problems. Britain must pay its way in the world and that means attending to exports as well as to imports.

10.39 am

Mr. Warren Hawksley (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate. It is interesting that there is so little Opposition support for the motion—I congratulate the Government on the motion. In fact, there is almost a total absence of Opposition Members in the Chamber for this debate. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) spent more time dealing with imports and deficits than with the Government's success story on export growth. We are pleased to put that success story on record. In the final quarter of 1992, there was a 5·5 per cent. increase in exports by volume over the previous year. In March, in the non-EEC sector, exports rose by 3 per cent. We can be proud of that record.

Exporters need not just the Government help to which the motion refers but a domestic economy that offers home industries encouragement and confidence. The Government have provided that by bringing inflation under control, reducing interest rates—to encourage the investment that many exporters must make if they are to sell their products abroad—and lowering the level of the pound by withdrawing from the exchange rate mechanism. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central was critical of the Government for not withdrawing earlier from the ERM, but I hope that he at least acknowledges the benefits now of that action.

Exporters must make sure that the quality of their products is high enough. In days of old, Britain could not export abroad because its potential customers were unsure that our goods would be delivered on time.

Mr. Stephen: Or at all.

Mr. Hawksley: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House of that point.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend not consider it extraordinary that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), who was once a lecturer in industrial relations—despite having no background in industry himself—did not care to mention that important fact and to endorse my hon. Friend's observation?

Mr. Hawksley: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of the hon. Gentleman's previous incarnation. In the late 1970s, our exports suffered because of the fear among potential foreign customers that the quality of British goods would not be high enough and that delivery would be unreliable. In contrast, last year this country enjoyed the best industrial relations in the 100 years since records began. That is very different from 1978-79, when the perception of foreign customers after the winter of discontent gave them cause for second thoughts.

It is not enough for the Government to produce money, leadership or even just advice and encouragement. British industry has a great responsibility—having been given that help, advice and encouragement—to sell its goods. My hon. Friend the Minister rightly referred to the partnership that must exist between industry and the Government which has helped industry considerably.

The overseas trade service has been restructured and extended, and even the Opposition welcomed changes in the Export Credits Guarantee Department scheme—£2 billion more cover for projected exports was made available last autumn and the rates are now 25 per cent. lower than in 1991-92, to bring them into line with the average of our competitors.

If exports are to grow, foreign markets must improve. The recession that occurred not only in this country but world wide harmed opportunities for British exporters. That was brought home to me two years ago, when I visited a factory in my constituency that had exported boilers for 40 years. Its owner told me that, for the first time, all his markets were down simultaneously. Normally, if the export climate in Europe were bad, he relied on America, Australia or the far east—one area was always doing reasonably well. Two years ago, that was no longer the case. Today, thank goodness, some economies—including our own—are improving.

As someone who has rebelled against the Maastricht treaty on many occasions and who has grave reservations about events in Europe, I believe that the Government should place even greater emphasis on achieving a settlement on the general agreement on tariffs and trade. That is more important than anything that the House has debated for many hours recently. Mr. Delors must be persuaded never again to interfere in the name of France, or as part of his campaign to become President of France, and mess up the GATT agreement discussions. A new agreement having the full support of Europe and America must be introduced quickly. That would help us more than anything else.

As someone who is sceptical of actions that are often taken in our name in Brussels, I am not sure whether we are allowed any longer to talk about exports to Europe. I am uncertain whether, after the introduction of the single market, we are now part of one common market that does not have imports and exports between those who are in it. I spoke from the no platform during the referendum campaign on Europe and have consistently advocated a free trade area—trade between the United Kingdom and Europe should be free and fair.

Our exporters are at a disadvantage in two respects. What is being done to ensure no repetition of those scenes of French farmers and fishermen blocking our exports? At the time, we heard that compensation was being claimed and that the Government were putting strong pressure on the French.

Government help to exporters must include expression of the strong view that such action will not be tolerated. Every few years, the French farmers or the French fishermen get upset and start closing down the ports. What will the Government do to ensure that such incidents are not repeated yet again?

The export of steel and steel products is of especial concern to my constituency. I am told by my steel

[Mr. Hawksley]

producers that they cannot compete with the Italian price. They know that the price at which steel is sold in Italy is lower than the cost of producing it. Are the Government doing all that they can to ensure that we trade fairly within the Community in commodities such as steel? If a subsidy is being paid, as my producers suggest, it is not an approved subsidy, but an unfair one. That makes it much harder for my producers to export to many of the markets into which they would like to go.

I pay tribute on behalf of my constituents to the regional offices of the Department of Trade and Industry. My constituents find that the regional offices have changed their attitude considerably in the past 18 months to two years. In the old days, they found that if they contacted the Department at regional level in the west midlands, the answers that they were given were typical civil servants' answers and almost predictable. In the past two years, they have noticed a considerable change. They have noticed that the Department at regional level is very much more helpful. It not only answers the questions that my producers ask but has introduced initiatives and gives help and encouragement. That is very much appreciated by many exporters in the west midlands.

It is interesting that there was a brief from the Confederation of British Industry before the debate. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central spoke about representations from the CBI. It is interesting that the CBI went on record as saying:

"The Government's export support services both at home and abroad have shown considerable improvements and increased professionalism in recent years and it is essential that this is now built upon."

That is what my constituents tell me of the Department at regional level, and I welcome that very much.

I raise another constituency problem that involves exports on which I have had discussions with the Department—the support that is given for those who wish to participate in international exhibitions and shows. Some constituents in the west midlands recently had problems with participating in the Hanover fair. Most of them run small businesses. In previous years, up to 10 businesses from the Dudley area have participated in the show. They have been supported by the Birmingham chamber of commerce and have come through the scheme organised by the Department.

This year, those businesses found that they had to commit themselves as early as 15 October to paying for the right to be at the exhibition. In the present climate and with their present cash-flow problems, that was far too early for them. I hope that the Department can help by covering the period up to the show, so that those businesses do not have to pay too far in advance, or by persuading people on an international basis that applications to participate in international exhibitions can be submitted later. Perhaps the Government could make the booking and then sell it on at a later date.

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): Does my hon. Friend know whether the terms for overseas companies required by the organisers of the Hanover Fair will obtain in respect of German-based companies?

Mr. Hawksley: I do not know. I have had correspondence with the Department. Baroness Denton wrote to me, saying:

"The timing of 'cut-off dates' for applications is alway the subject of discussion between officials and group sponsors . . . but, invariably, they are set in relation to the space booking deadlines set by exhibition organisers."

It is the organisers who set the date; I do not know whether it is the same date for all participants. My hon. Friend the Minister may be able to tell us whether the date set for the German exhibitors differed from the date set for the British exhibitors.

The Foreign Office has increased its commercial expertise. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central said that some people had gone around many embassies in the world. I have not been to many. However, over the past few years, the few that I have visited have shown more understanding of the needs of business men and of those who are trying to export.

I mention one story in the press this week which caused some concern to those of us who read it. The Prince of Wales made a trip to Poland. You may have read, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the fact that he was not allowed to use two Jaguars which were provided by Jaguar for his use. Jaguar has just set up an organisation in Poland to sell its vehicles and it has opened an office there. Unfortunately, the Polish authorities made the Prince travel in a Volvo. The two British Jaguars were allowed to go in the procession, but were not used by him. Such incidents are a great disappointment to exporters. We do not always use to the best of our ability the opportunities that are given by not only ministerial visits but royal visits and other special occasions to push and to encourage the use of British commodities.

I turn with some trepidation to defence exports. It was in my constituency that Walter Somers produced the Iraqi pipe or gun, depending on one's interpretation of the piece of metal exported. Defence exports have not been mentioned at any great length in our debate, although I appreciate the fact that there was a debate a couple of days ago when they were raised. We should realise what a market there is in defence and how successful the British Government have managed to be in conjunction with our exporters. This is one area in which Government-to-Government experience and relationships are important. That is not so true in other areas, but in defence exports, it is invariably Governments who carry out the negotiations. I have some experience of the matter from my previous constituency of The Wrekin, where GKN produced the Warrior. On occasions, GKN found that Government-to-Government discussions were necessary to conclude satisfactory deals.

In 1982, we sold £1·7 billion of defence exports. That figure is now up to £5·1 billion, and is rising year on year. That is a success which we should try to foster and encourage. I again stress the need for playing fields to be level—a phrase often used in the House. I am nervous because in defence exports, when Governments are dealing with Governments, some purchasers do not use the ethics that British business men use. I am keen that the Foreign Office should do all that it can to ensure that the countries with which it deals treat our bids on the same basis as those from other countries.

The suggestion that other countries and other organisations offer bribes on occasions is a common accusation. It is not easy to prove, but it has been made many times. It is important that the Government do all that they can to help those in defence exports to ensure that there is a level playing field on which they can put in

their bids at a competitive level. If that happened, we should be able to increase our defence exports. We have about 20 per cent. of the world market in defence exports. That highlights the importance of defence to our exporters. We welcome the Government's help through the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Exports are even more important to those Members with defence-related industries in their constituencies. Because of the so-called peace dividend, many countries, including our own, will naturally reduce their defence expenditure over the next few years. The defence budgets of Britain and the United States will be cut considerably, but opportunities are available that will ensure that our defence-related industries do not lose out at that time. More opportunities than ever are now available to them to compete in the export market.

I congratulate the Government on their success. The Opposition were not charitable enough to congratulate the Government. They tried to highlight the other side of coin and suggested that our import levels were too high. They may be too high, but we should encourage and congratulate the Government and industry on what they have done. Following devaluation of the pound and the reduction in interest rates, which will lead to further investment in this country, the time is now better than ever for British industry to export. I am sure that the Government will continue to give industry the support that is necessary.

11.1 am

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I disagree with the final point made by the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) about defence exports, but I shall deal with it later in my speech.

The hon. Gentleman began, with great courtesy, by thanking you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling him early in the debate. I am sorry that I cannot make an equally felicitous observation to you, since it seems to me that you did not have much option in my case. When I made an unkind reference earlier to the fact that only the Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), was present on behalf of the official Opposition, he said, sotto voce to me, that he thought that I had been a Member of the House long enough not to have to be here on a Friday. I repeat that publicly only so that the managers of my party may read the Christian and charitable observation that was offered by the Opposition and take note of it for the future.

Mr. Fatchett: And I will write the right hon. Gentleman a reference.

Sir David Steel: Before the hon. Gentleman is encouraged to go too far, may I say that the view taken by my party was that, since I do more travelling than anybody else in my party, this was an ideal opportunity for me to give the House the benefit of my experience.

I am glad to be able to participate in this debate on Government support for exporters. I come from a noted exporting part of the country. I shall be critical of the Government later in my speech, so let me heap praise on them to start with by saying that Scotland as a whole is pleased that in his Budget the Chancellor recognised the importance of the Scotch whisky industry to the total exporting drive of this country. We are very grateful to him for that.

My part of Scotland has an unrivalled record in exporting high-quality knitwear, tweed and leather clothing to all parts of the world. The secret of our survival of the recession and the general trend towards import substitution in clothing is the emphasis that we place on quality, both in manufacture and design. There are world famous names in my constituency, such as Ballantyne Sportswear, as well as many lesser known but successful small businesses.

When I was in Buenos Aires a few weeks ago, I turned a street corner and found, to my great delight, a large corner shop with the name "Pringle of Scotland" above it. That is another firm in the Borders region. I went in to see how it was getting on and discovered that the shop had been open for only two weeks. That, again, is a good sign that the Scottish knitwear trade is booming in different parts of the world.

The boom does not apply just to my own area and it does not apply only to the traditional industries. Chemicals, printed circuits and so on are doing well. The general economic lesson is that those firms that engage heavily in the export drive have ridden out the recession better than those that did not.

There is a particular constituency point that I wish to mention before I turn to the wider picture. My local enterprise company has pointed out to me that the grant support for enterprise initiative programmes in the non-assisted areas—I represent a non-assisted area—has dropped from 50 per cent. to a third. It has put forward a good argument, to which I hope the Minister will respond: that for export-dedicated programmes the grant level should be reinstated at 50 per cent. If grant support could be focused on export efforts, it would be worth while increasing the grant level again.

I want to put forward three propositions by means of which the Government could improve what I accept is not a bad record in assistance to exporters. The first relates to the Export Credits Guarantee Department. It is good news that the money allocated for that purpose is to be increased, but I draw the Minister's attention to criticisms that have been made of the recent changes in the Department. Those criticisms are not made by me. They were put to me by a firm that has had 25 years' experience of dealing with the ECGD. In its letter to me it said:

"ECGD was a great help. When we made an application for cover to give credit to a foreign customer, it was vetted by ECGD and in all cases we got the go ahead. This meant we could comfortably give credit and in the event of any loss we would recover 90 per cent. from ECGD."

The letter went on to say that the firm had made only one claim throughout its 25 years experience of dealing with ECGD and that that was for a sum of less than £3,000. The company argues that over that period of a quarter of a century the ECGD has made very good money out of it. The letter also said that, since ECGD was transferred to a private company, NCM Credit Insurance, it has had nothing but trouble from that firm. The Minister may be able to comment on that. I hope that it is not a typical experience, but it is a disturbing one.

The letter went on to say:

"For a start the staff are offhand, unhelpful and arrogant."

The firm went on to give me three recent cases where it had been refused cover. For commercial reasons, I do not think that I should give in the Chamber the names of the companies involved. However, they are in different parts of the world—Africa, eastern Europe and the middle east.

[Sir David Steel]

All of them are well-established organisations in their own countries. The firm then says that because of the refusal of cover it has been

"obliged to ask for letters of credit (confirmed by a London Clearing Bank) or cash up front. This makes selling difficult and therefore does not help exports. I am sure we can go out and export much more provided we are given the necessary background support. The more we export the more jobs we create and the more foreign currency we earn."

I hope that the Minister will take note of that criticism. If he wants the details I shall supply them to him. If that is in any way part of a wider picture, I trust that the company that now operates ECGD will be given a bit of stimulus by the Department of Trade and Industry.

My second proposition is that we can do even more through our embassies. I have observed that more people from the DTI are now working in our embassies, but can the Minister give us any figures? This is a helpful trend. I should like the commercial sections of our embassies to be much more of a mixture between traditional Foreign Office appointments and persons assigned from the DTI. My experience suggests that that is happening, but it would be interesting to know to what extent that is the case and to what extent the DTI is planning to increase its representation.

Not all commercial sections of all embassies are at the moment attuned to the needs of small businesses. Small businesses frequently criticise the fact that nationally known companies get red carpet treatment from the embassies whereas they do not. To some extent, that is inevitable, but I hope that our embassies are under instructions to give all possible assistance to smaller firms. One thing that they object to is the fact that the Government, no doubt as part of their cost-cutting exercises, are starting to demand payment for the services of the commercial section of our embassies.

That is a rather penny-pinching approach. After all, every time a job is created through export orders obtained, some £9,000 of public expenditure in Britain on unemployment benefit and income support is saved. The Government should consider that in their search for reductions in public expenditure, which is currently focusing on social security. To make life difficult for the small firms that are trying to earn export orders seems an odd way to go about saving public expenditure.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge said about foreign exhibitions; he referred to Hanover in particular. I do not know whether it is a general DTI rule, but it appears that small firms cease to receive support after they have appeared at the same exhibition on three occasions. I do not understand the logic of that. If a firm has exhibited in a particular place and finds it worth while going back, surely it should continue to receive support. There should not be a cut-off rule—if, indeed, there is. I should be interested to know. Such exhibitions are of enormous value, especially to small firms. As I keep saying, smaller firms have greater export potential.

My third observation again relates mainly to the small business sector. There is still a feeling that our banks are less kind to the industrial sector than is the case in other countries. I do not know what the DTI can do about that. I pose the question, without expecting an answer, but the DTI should attempt to encourage and exhort the banks to be more sympathetic to commercial lending. Companies have had to look for ways to tighten their belts during the recession, and consequently there has been a trimming of support for research and development and exporting missions. That might make good short-term sense, but it certainly does not make sense in the long term. If firms need access to working capital to expand both research and development and exporting missions, they should be encouraged and enabled by the banks in that.

In both Japan and Germany—two of our major industrial competitors—co-operation between industry, the banking sector and the Government is much closer than it is in Britain. I am aware that the Government have a scheme that guarantees 85 per cent. of a bank loan, but I am told that many firms believe that they must be almost bankrupt before they qualify. Could that scheme be expanded to encourage more commercial lending?

I said earlier that there were some points about the arms trade on which I would disagree with the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge. It is an extremely difficult issue, and one of particular sensitivity for him coming from the constituency that he does. However, the House must recognise that there is growing public opinion, not just in this country but world wide, that over-reliance on the arms trade is not something of which we should be proud.

In both the Falklands and the Gulf wars, our service men found themselves up against weaponry and technology that we had sold to Argentina and Iraq. Surely the lesson is that we must be far more careful about reliance on the arms trade. The House has had many debates about Bosnia. One reason why early air cover was not provided by either fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters was that surplus weaponry from the Afghan war, supplied by the Americans to the Afghan rebels, had found its way to the former Yugoslavia. Among that weaponry were shoulder-operated, surface-to-air missiles. Once those are scattered around, it is difficult to provide air cover with any safety.

Mr. Hawksley: I accept that our arms exports have been used against our troops in the past, but if we had not supplied them would they not have been supplied by other countries anyway?

Sir David Steel: I was about to come to that point; I have not completed my argument.

I said at the outset that this is a difficult issue. However, one step forward has been made during the past year or two, with considerable support from the Prime Minister, and that is the establishment of the United Nations arms register. That is the beginning of getting international control over the spread of weaponry.

I recognise, and in this the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, that currently one of the biggest sources of arms is the former Soviet Union. A tremendous amount of Soviet Union weaponry is washing around the world fuelling many of the trouble spots, especially in Africa. I have said previously in foreign affairs debates that I was told that AK47s were being sold on the streets of Mozambique for $2 each. The world must stop and take stock of that and ask whether we are right to continue to encourage our armaments suppliers on the same scale as at present.

The hon. Gentleman was correct to suggest that international action is required. However, I do not share the rather cavalier attitude that export credit facilities

should be offered to the arms trade. Surely that is one way in which Britain can contribute to reducing that trade. Export credit facilities should be run down and the DTI should concentrate on encouraging firms to move out of the arms trade and into other areas. I accept that that is a long-term ambition, but there must be a deliberate switch in policy to achieve it. I have been slightly side-tracked into discussing the discouragement of certain exports, but it is an important issue.

The Government lost about £21 billion of taxpayers' money in the poll tax fiasco. They lost an unquantifiable amount in their bungling of the European exchange rate mechanism. Therefore, in asking the Government to pump more investment into industry and to encourage exports, we are asking for only a fraction of what they have lost through some of their bungled policies. Let us thank them for what they have done so far, but also encourage them to do even more.

11.17 am

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I declare a business interest as I am a long-standing director of P. W. Merkle Ltd., a company which specialises in the import and export of processing machinery for the plastics, rubber and leather industries. It is my experience with that company which leads me to begin my remarks by concentating on the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett). He said that recently he had increasingly noticed the presence of foreign-made machine tools in the factories when he visited in his constituency and elsewhere. He is correct in what he says, but he has underestimated the time period during which the change has occurred. It was evident not only in the 1980s and 1970s, but in the 1960s and 1950s. Indeed, for non-ferrous processing machinery the change can be traced back to the 1930s and even the 1920s.

Shortly after the turn of the century, this country stopped producing certain types of processing machinery and had to rely on imports. There were deep and technical reasons for that. I subscribe to some of the views expressed over the years by Mr. Correlli Barnett about the real origins of the change. We must accept that it has not been a recent change; it has been with us for most of the century. For metalworking machinery, the trend has, if anything, begun to be reversed in that some United Kingdom sources probably have a stronger market position now than they had 10, 15 or 20 years ago.

Britain has a remarkable record of export achievements because it exports a quarter of everything that it makes. As the Minister said, exports are still increasing. In 1992, the figure increased by 3·5 per cent. and in January this year we reached the highest-ever export figure—£4·3 billion—to non-EC countries. That is a very great achievement, but it is not good enough because, as the hon. Member for Leeds, Central was at pains to point out, we have a significant visible trade deficit. Last year, exports stood at £108·2 billion and imports at £125 billion. We certainly need to improve in that respect, but what worries me is our trading position with Europe with which we currently have a deficit of £5·1 billion—£65·6 billion of imports and £60·5 billion of exports. We have a trade deficit with all but three of the EC countries. We manage a surplus only with Ireland, Greece and Spain. With Germany, our main trading partner, we have a significant imbalance which now stands at £4 billion.

However, we can be fairly sure that the reason for that imbalance is no longer the lack of quality products, which it certainly was at one time. It is no longer a question of price or delivery, which used to be the bane of British exporters. In most cases, we are now able to deliver on time as promised. The imbalance is to some extent the result of gaps in the range of products that we have to offer, the origin of which goes back a long time, but it is more due to our marketing skills needing to be sharpened, a lack of promotion, the need for smooth administration of export procedures and inadequate determination to pull out all the stops to win business. We must ensure that the Government give as much support as they can to British exporters, and at least as much as exporters from other countries receive from their national Governments.

I congratulate the President of the Board of Trade and the Under-Secretary of State for Technology on the progress that they have made. In outlining his Department's progress, the Under-Secretary was, if anything, rather modest about his achievements. The Department has developed many initiatives: there are now many more foreign visits and a systematic opening of new markets and reworking of older markets with, as the Under-Secretary said, particular emphasis on India, China and other countries in the far east, as well as countries in Africa, such as Ghana in particular.

Wherever possible, the Department has backed British exporters. It has done so against a background of changes in economic policy, which the Minister mentioned, such as the simplification of the tax system and a reduction in the tax burden. Much hard work is also being carried out to try to secure a satisfactory result to the GATT round, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley) said. In addition, there is a continual development of the single market. By any standards, there has been an enormous improvement. I stress that because I should not like the Department to feel that the few shortcomings which I wish to mention detract from the substantial achievements that have been made.

If one considers the views of the Confederation of British Industry, which was quick enough to supply a brief for the debate, one finds an interesting contrast between what it is saying now and what it said two or three years ago. Two or three years ago, it was very conscious of the Government's shortcomings in supporting exporters, but there has been a gradual change in the views expressed by CBI members. They used to speak of the significant bureaucratic obstacles and excessive paperwork for exporters. They used to emphasise disguised subsidies to foreign competitors and speak of the lack of hard commercial experience of embassy staff and Whitehall personnel. They used to focus in particular on inadequate export credit insurance facilities, but the complaints and criticism are no longer on the same scale.

The Institute of Directors, which represents many exporting companies, has undergone a similar transformation but remains critical in some respects. In December 1992, the IOD made a submission to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. It reported on the findings of a survey that it had undertaken. In the context of trade with Europe, the survey had identified legal difficulties, administrative red tape, problems with cross-border transaction costs and a high level of subsidies still prevailing in some European countires, and sometimes unfair subsidies at that. They were seen as barriers to the successful promotion of products by British exporters.

[Mr. Douglas French]

One in four of the IOD's members referred to legal problems and one in three referred to administrative difficulties and too many regulations.

The IOD's report stated:

"The IOD calls upon the Department of Trade and Industry to play a more supportive role for UK business in dismantling obstacles to trade.

The key to the creation of the European internal market —'the principle of mutual recognition'—is being eroded by a multitude of protectionist non-tariff barriers which block market access"

and

"distort competition".

France and Germany were singled out as offenders in that respect. In some ways, that is not surprising as France and Germany are our largest trading partners in Europe.

Nevertheless, one should not underestimate Franco guile. We recall the infamous occasion a few years ago when the French Government sought by rather devious means to limit the import of Japanese video recorders by declaring that, although they were not placing on them any value or quantity limit, it would in future be necessary for them to clear customs at Poitiers. Hon. Members who are familiar with the geography of France will know that Poitiers is not the most accessible place for customs clearance. I believe that the French placed one customs man in a nissen hut to undertake that task. It was an effective method of limiting Japanese imports. Although it is very difficult to identify further examples, most business men say that such obstacles exist and must be rooted out. It must be the responsibility of national Governments to ensure that other members of the European Community are playing fair, which is not always the case at present.

There is no doubt that the Department of Trade and Industry has made massive progress and I pay tribute to the President of the Board of Trade for his latest initiatives. However, I couple that tribute with a slight reservation that it has perhaps taken longer than it should have done for the message conveyed by British exporters to be translated into action in the Department. One example of its taking too long is the question of export credit insurance, to which the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) referred a moment ago.

There has been concern about the availability of medium and long-term export credit insurance. One acknowledges the changes that were made in the Budget —a 7·5 per cent. reduction in export insurance premium rates—coming on top of a 20 per cent. reduction last year and additional export credit cover of £1·3 billion targeted especially at Hong Kong, China and other far east countries. While one is grateful for those changes, it remains the case that the CBI, in its brief issued for today, none the less says:

"Although the increased funding in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and March Budget was welcomed, some problems remain e.g.—the lack of cover for some markets; the ceilings on cover for others; markedly higher premiums than those paid by UK's competitors; and, for short-term business, uncertainties about the Government's willingness to continue reinsurance of political risk."

In the light of that up-to-date comment from the CBI, I urge the Minister to re-examine the issue of export credit cover. The Minister said that the premium rates cannot always be the cheapest and the most competitive across the board. However, it is the case that the CBI, having consulted its members, would not continue to make that point unless it still had worries about the matter. I hope and feel sure that the Minister will give his attention to the matter, perhaps in conjunction with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

The lesson repeatedly is that the Government need to realise more quickly some of the difficulties which exporters encounter. My hon. Friend the Minister referred to the three ministerial visits to China in 1992. That is commendable, but some commentators point out that those visits were made to boost business with China at a time when adequate credit cover or cover at an adequate price was not available so that when exporters made their quotations and delivery promises—if business opportunities arose—they were handicapped because of the lack of essential cover. It is a question not only of having the cover in place at the right price but of knowing in advance when negotiating the order that the cover will be available. if it takes—as one hears of some examples—two to three months to get confirmation of whether the cover will be available, an order can be lost before it is started.

I shall refer to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge about the ethics of doing export business. I hope and feel sure that exporters in the United Kingdom play by the rules—at least, we play by the British rules. By any international standards, our rules must be commended. However, it is a sad fact that other countries do not always play by the rules and there are countless examples of orders being won by our competitors as a result, especially, of the bribing of officials. There is no point in turning a blind eye to that —everyone knows that it happens. We are faced with the dilemma: do we indulge in the same sort of practices, or maintain a more ethical way of conducting ourselves?

It should be possible for the United Kingdom exporters to stand their ground and always deal honourably. I am not for one moment suggesting that we should indulge in bribes. I am suggesting that we need to be acutely aware of the results of such bribes, the fact that they are being made and the need for us to be able to offer something with an equivalent attraction—not in the form of bribe, but in the form of a better deal or better delivery, or something equivalent—which makes it harder for the would-be recipient of the bribe to accept what is being offered. Otherwise, I fear that we shall lose export business, as we are doing at present.

A small firm in my constituency, Agriculture Polymers, has had direct experience of doing export business with Kenya and losing out as a result of the alleged bribing of local officials. That is one tiny example to which I refer, but many companies have encountered the same thing in other places.

Sir David Steel: I entirely agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. Since he mentioned Kenya, is not the only way that we can help by having a general attitude in our foreign policy that backs up world financial institutions, as part of the programme of good government, to stamp out corruption in a much tougher way than we have done so far?

Mr. French: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman—that is a sensible approach. Indeed, I do not know of any positive, useful and practical proposals that have been put

forward by anyone to tackle the problem of bribery. The right hon. Gentleman's suggestion strikes me as being a perfectly constructive one.

There is also some evidence that our embassy staff, as a result of the influence of the combined effects of the DTI and the Foreign Office, have gone through a considerable transformation. However, there have been many examples where they have not been fighting hard enough. I shall quote from a letter sent to me by the managing director of another Gloucester company, Simon Gloster Saro:

"we are now producing at Gloucester the world's market leader in Airport Crash Fire and Rescue vehicles, but our ability to sell these world wide is restricted by the well known problem of the 'level playing field' when compared to our overseas competitors. Our major competitors in Austria, Holland and France not only appear to be indirectly assisted by their governments but they appear to get more direct assistance and more concessional finance directly available for their business . . . I can give you an example of one of our major foreign competitors who is in the fortunate position"—

this is in the context of supplying firefighting equipment for use at airports, in which Simon Gloster Saro specialises—

"to have the Austrian Ambassador in person present a soft loan and a quotation to the Government Purchasing Authority for Airport Equipment"—

the purchasing authority was in the far east.

"In spite of the competitor's vehicles being less suitable than ours, and much more expensive, the business was placed in Austria."

I am happy to tell the House that that letter was written to me at the end of 1991 and the circumstances which brought that letter about have changed significantly. However, it remains the case that there is a knock-on effect because, if an order is lost in 1991 as a result of the ambassador of the opposing country, if I may put it that way, coming up front and taking an active role in securing the order, once a supplier has got into another country —in this case, Austria got in its equipment—the tendency is that the purchaser, having decided on that line of equipment, will continue placing orders with the same source in subsequent years.

So Simon Gloster Saro lost out once and will almost certainly continue to lose out to this customer in the future. That is why the change that has now taken place should have a successively beneficial effect.

I also wish to refer to export opportunities with former Soviet republics. My hon. Friend the Minister referred to Kazakhstan. It is well known that Kazakhstan offers tremendous opportunities. The combined enterprise of British Gas with Agip is an example to everyone. It secured the right to negotiate exclusively with the Government of Kazakhstan to purchase the reserves of the giant Karachaganak gas field. That was a tremendous achievement.

I recall a parliamentary question that was answered on 13 January in which I asked about trade with Kazakhstan. I was able to discover how much export business was done by Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany with Kazakhstan, but, because the figures were not available, I was unable to discover how much export business Britain did with Kazakhstan. I am advised that the figures did not begin to be collected until January 1993.

I was pleased to learn from the answer to another parliamentary question that the Department of Trade and Industry section which previously dealt with the Soviet Union before it split up had been enlarged and restructured. There are now separate sections dealing with Transcaucasia and central Asia. That is a sensible and reasonable division.

However, when Kazakhstan was recognised at the end of January 1991, we appointed as ambassador Sir Brian Fall, who is based in Moscow. He did not present his credentials in Alma Ata until October 1992—nine months later. Since then we have had a small embassy in Alma Ata headed by a chargé d'affaires. Unless there has been a recent change, the ambassador is still based in Moscow. It seems insensitive to the Government of Kazakhstan, who have sought to distance themselves from the Moscow regime, to base our ambassador in Moscow several thousand miles away. Our ambassador should have a role in securing export business. It is essential that the ambassador is located in the country itself. It will be only a disadvantage if that cannot be arranged.

There are some hidden obstacles for exporters. For example, the VAT form 101 "EC Sales List" requires the company that is exporting to include the customer's VAT registration number. The form assumes that if a company is exporting it automatically will not charge VAT. Of course, that is not the case. A company may well sell to an overseas customer for delivery in the United Kingdom. That applies particularly to certain services. If they are deliverable in the United Kingdom, VAT will still be charged, even though the supply is made to a foreign customer.

The form automatically assumes that the customer's registration number will be known. It works on the assumption that the company will have received a piece of paper from the customer placing the order. But if a company receives an order through the post, for example as the result of a direct mail campaign, it may receive back part of the direct mail that it sent out placing an order for the product that it offers. That is the experience of many publishing companies.

In those circumstanees, the company does not know the VAT registration number of its purchaser. The amount of work and trouble involved in finding that number may be out of all proportion to the value of the sale. So form 101 is impractical and will cause a great deal of trouble. That is not only my view but that of one of my constituency companies, A. Searle and Co. in Gloucester, which has also drawn attention to form C1501.

Form C1501 refers to intra-EC trade statistics. It contains several boxes. The form requires the first box to be filled in with the commodity code. But it does not make provision—as A. Searle and Co. has found out—for an invoice including several different items with different commodity codes. The items must be broken down if the form is to be filled in. If they are to be broken down, with a multi-part invoice, considerable extra work is required. A. Searle and Co. asks why it cannot simply give a copy of the invoice to Customs and Excise. That always happened in the past. All the information required was on the invoice. The form seems to be extra and unnecessary.

A. Searle also draws attention to the way in which the form is designed. Two lines are required for every entry. That makes it more difficult than usual to obtain a spreadsheet computer package to deal with the form. That is especially difficult for small businesses. So I urge that such practical considerations are given careful attention when decisions to require data from exporters are made.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): On point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend, but there is a rumour that inflation has fallen to 1.3 per cent. Is it possible to ask for a statement from my hon. Friend the Minister to confirm that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Leigh: Perhaps I might help the House. I can confirm that the inflation figures were published about 15 minutes ago. They are down to 1.3 per cent. over a year. That is down from 1.9 per cent. last month. As far as——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we had better return to the debate.

Mr. French: While I do not intend to stray from the subject of the debate, I must say that the figures are good news for British exporters. It is good news that the Government's economic policy has continued to deliver steadily decreasing inflation which will undoubtedly assist our continued export drive. I am certain that Conservative Members will welcome that news. The Opposition are under-represented this morning—there is only one Labour Member and one Liberal Member present, but I am sure that they would also wish to welcome the news.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): The hon. Gentleman keeps referring to the fact that there are few Members present. If he wishes to test to see if there are 40 Government Members present to form a quorum, I am prepared to call a Division to see whether there are 40 bodies on the premises.

Mr. French: If the hon. Gentleman feels that such action would be more helpful than continuing a debate on an important subject, he can take it. However, I think that Conservative Members would prefer to continue debating this important subject.

I congratulate the Department of Trade and Industry and the Minister representing it today. They have achieved a tremendous transformation in the past year or so. They are undoubtedly providing tremendous new backing and helpful support to exporters. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the additional export promoters who have been recruited and who will have a significant effect. They are, in the main, people who have spent much of their careers in the export business and do not come to their jobs with merely theoretical views. They have had direct experience of exporting, which is vital if they are to offer advice to others.

My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned one-stop advice shops which are important. He also mentioned the overseas visits, which are of equal importance. We now appear to have a coherent strategy to promote our exports to the best possible effect. It is a story of tremendous improvement on which I congratulate the Government.

11.52 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I believe that it was in 1732 that Thomas Fuller said:

"There needs to be a long apprenticeship to understand the mysteries of the world's trade.

I am aware that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) has not served such an apprenticeship—I believe that his apprenticeship consisted of writing books about industrial relations. I am sure that, were he in the Chamber, he would be as delighted as I am that industrial relations have improved so much over the past 13 or 14 years.

I have served some apprenticeship in industry. Ten years before becoming a Member of Parliament, I formed a company with a colleague, and I have spent the past five or six years exporting broadcasting electronic equipment manufactured in Cornwall. I am the proud possessor of a Trade and Industry credit card—one of the many innovations to have come out of the Department in the past two or three years.

Some of my hon. Friends will know that my political leanings tend to be free market. I am a great believer in the 19th century economist Walter Bagehot, who said:

"All Governments like to interfere; it elevates their position to make out that they can cure the evils of mankind."

On a programme the other day, one of my colleagues said that if there were no Ministers, the civil service would probably continue to run the country perfectly well, but the civil servants were the engines and we were the fuel to provide innovation. I am sure that the civil servants would agree. I notice that not only was Walter Bagehot an excellent 19th century economist, but he enjoyed longevity, as he writes, even today, in *The Economist*.

Experience in industry often tempers political philosophy. I believe that there is no monopoly on evil or virtue in any contract into which one may enter with a customer. There is no monopoly on virtue or evil in any treaty into which we may enter with a nation or group of nations. Compromise is the hallmark of what happens in the real world.

I have said that I am a supporter of the free market. I recall the former Prime Minister speaking in the House about nuclear defence. She said that we cannot unilaterally disarm while other countries have nuclear weapons. Equally, much as I should like the whole world to disarm and allow a free market to operate, as long as other countries support their industries we must intervene to do the same. That is only logical.

It is important to consider how we intervene. Some years ago, a Japanese Prime Minister said that Japan intervenes, but the difference between Japan's intervention and that of Anglo-Saxon countries—his phrase—was that we intervene to support our weak industries while Japan does so to make its strong industries stronger. That was probably true in the 1970s, but it is no longer true. We are intervening now, delicately but effectively, to support industries that are doing well and to help them to do even better.

How well are we doing? We are exporting 25 per cent. of what we produce. We are a great maritime nation and a great trading nation, and there is nothing wrong with being proud of flying the flag. Our per capita exports are greater than those of Japan or the United States of America.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central said that I was reading out a Conservative central office brief, implying that there was some lack of authenticity about it. I have certainly read my brief—I hope that the Whip has heard that—but I would add that the information comes from the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and "Eurostat". The information is thus authentic.

Despite the recession overseas, our export volumes are at a record high. We can be triumphant about that. To some degree, our leaving the ERM had something to do with it. It has given us a competitive exchange rate and

some of the lowest interest rates in Europe. That will encourage our business men and manufacturers to invest, and they will be able to borrow more easily and service their debts. However, I quite agree with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who said that British banks are often very conservative about lending to manufacturers. That certainly coincides with my experience. It is a sad reflection on banking in this country that our bankers, particularly high street bankers, go to school and university and then straight into banking, with no experience of manufacturing. It is galling trying to put a proposition to a banker only to be told by some pipsqueak that in his opinion the loan would be risky.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the pipsqueak in question is likely to say, more often that not, "I am sorry; I have no authority—the matter will have to be referred to head office"?

Mr. Fabricant: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is a sad indictment of banking that there are pipsqueaks not only in the high street banks but in head offices, too. However, there are fewer of them in the merchant banks where there is a far greater tradition of the entrepreneurial spirit of adventurous lending. There is still a gap, although it is being narrowed, between the amounts being lent by high street banks and those lent by merchant bankers. It is sometimes difficult to borrow money for industrial development, but when it can be found interest rates are encouragingly low.

One of the advantages of membership of the ERM was our ability to control inflation. In 1977-78, inflation was 27 to 28 per cent. It was almost impossible to compete in world markets for long-term contracts that had to be priced over six months or a year because prices could not be maintained. Tenderers had to anticipate inflation and set rates abnormally high, making tenders even more uncompetitive.

The news today of inflation of 1·3 per cent., which is the lowest in my lifetime, is to be applauded. I am delighted that we left the ERM and I can see no immediate prospect of our returning to it. I hope that the Government will continue to follow their tight fiscal policy so as to maintain low inflation, low interest rates and competitive exchange rates, while encouraging growth. For the third successive quarter there has been a reduction in unemployment.

Britain enjoys the lowest corporation tax in the European Community. Companies have to operate in an environment that encourages trade and business, and low corporation tax is vital because it encourages not only British businesses but foreign businesses to invest in Britain.

Strikes have been mentioned. As I have said, inflation is the lowest that I have known in my lifetime. Strikes are at their lowest level since 1891, which is well before my birth and, I suspect, before yours, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In 1979, 29 million working days were lost through strikes. The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) may say that that was the year of the winter of discontent and may wish to be excused from taking the credit for that. However, in 1978, 9 million working days were lost through strikes. Last year, only 500,000 days were lost, but even that is too much.

Over the past 14 years, we have transformed industrial relations, and that is another reason for United Kingdom businesses beginning to thrive again. We have had huge amounts of overseas investment and for that we should again fly the flag. We are but one of 12 EC nations, yet we attract more than 40 per cent. of all new inward investment. That statistic is often quoted in the Chamber, but it is worth repeating. Although it is not the Government's job to run companies, they have lent a helping hand by creating the environment in which business can thrive.

One of the environments that has been created is non-compliance with the social chapter. Jacques Delors has said that this country has become an investors' paradise. I think that he was criticising us, but we should be proud of that. The Labour party said that it abstained in the vote on Third Reading of the Maastricht Bill last night because it did not want to support the treaty without the social chapter. As non-adherence to the social chapter has created jobs, it is extraordinary that the Labour party, which I am convinced wants that to happen, still supports a policy that would create further unemployment. Perhaps the true motive for abstention last night was that it did not want to show the divisions within its own ranks.

The Government have given another helping hand—to the Export Credits Guarantee Department. Up to a few years ago, other countries enjoyed an advantage over us. I remember competing in nations in southern Africa and the far east and in Kenya against firms such as Siemens, which had cover from HERMES, the German equivalent of the ECGD. There are similar organisations in Japan and elsewhere. On 6 April 1992, ECGD rates were reduced by 20 per cent. In the autumn statement last year, cover in key markets went up by £700 million and in the 1993 budget, a further £1,300 million went into ECGD cover. So far from being at a disadvantage compared to HERMES, the ECGD now not only competes on an equal footing but gives British exporters a positive advantage over many of its competitors.

I, too, join my hon. Friend the Minister in complimenting the President of the Board of Trade on having extracted money from the Treasury. That is money well spent, which was worth investing. Incidentally, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be equally successful in getting money out of the Treasury when it comes to establishing British embassies abroad. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are co-operating far better than they used to. It is good to see the DTI having representatives in British embassies. However, we have British embassies in only a few of the 15 new countries that used to be Soviet socialist republics. The German Foreign Office has managed to establish embassies in all 15. We need representation there, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) has said.

My hon. Friend the Minister has another excellent colleague—my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, who is in charge of deregulation. That is a subject close to my heart, as I agree with Henry David Thoreau, who said in America as far back as 1849:

> "Trade and commerce, if they were not made of rubber, would never manage to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually putting in their way."

Let us try to sweep aside as much regulation as possible, leaving only that which assists exporters.

Last night, when we endorsed the European Communities (Amendment) Bill by giving it a Third

[Mr. Fabricant]

Reading, we also endorsed the ability of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to negotiate subsidiarity into the treaty. Although "subsidiarity" is a ghastly word which means nothing to 99 per cent. of the population, it is a tremendously important facet of the Maastricht treaty. As I said, no treaty or contract has a monopoly on virtue or evil. Nothing is that simple in the real world. Even so, subsidiarity is a vital ingredient.

Let us not forget that subsidiarity can be applied not only prospectively but retrospectively. I hope that that means that we shall be able to sweep aside much of the legislation that this Parliament has had to rubber stamp and which has proved an obstacle to our trade and industry. I am sure that the same has applied in other EC states. I am pleased that we have sent the Bill to the other place, where I hope its progress will be expedited.

The Conservative party and the nation have nothing of which to be ashamed with regard to exports. We must balance supportive intervention with the invisible hand of the free market. Britain will remain and grow as a great trading nation so long as the Department of Trade and Industry continues to balance interventionist policies with support for exporters, a task at which it has been eminently successful in the past couple of years.

12.11 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am pleased to be here on a Friday. That is an unusual statement to make for an hon. Member who represents a far-flung constituency. I was anxious to be here because of the nature of the debate and because it reflects on my constituency, as it does on most parts of the United Kingdom, for without exports many of the businesses in the area which I represent could not survive. In the modern world, we need Government assistance for exporters, and that assistance can be provided in a variety of ways.

I shall concentrate on many of the problems that companies face in my constituency as they strive to export and survive. I shall refer to some of the ways in which the Government have assisted and will continue to assist and point out ways in which they could do more without indulging in the sort of massive intervention which I could not support.

Industries and exports come in many shapes and sizes, so it may not be inappropriate for me to begin by congratulating Arsenal on the team's wonderful win last night. It not only won the cup final but, shortly before, won the league cup. Much was said by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) about the need for manufacturing industry. Perhaps he is not aware that the international coverage of last night's wonderful match earned our television producers good foreign exchange. It is outdated to identify exports simply as coming from the manufacturing and service sectors.

I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's speech and regretted bitterly that there were so few Labour Members present to hear it. Perhaps the Labour party was too frightened last night to whip its Members or even to encourage them into supporting the Government's ratification of the Maastricht treaty. I believe that they were wholly wrong to have been so fearful. After all, the Maastricht treaty merely fleshes out many of the concepts contained in the Single European Act 1986. The Single European Act has been not only embedded in our legislation since 31 December but has become a fact, an actuality. Membership of the European Community, together with the Single European Act, will probably do more to assist our exports than any other single Act of Parliament has ever done.

I represent a farming constituency and farmers are hands-on experts on the European Community. It is ironic that sometimes the success of exports reflects adversely on jobs in the United Kingdom. For example, 92 jobs were reported lost two weeks ago in Torrington, a small town in my constituency whose early manufacturing success was built on being Britain's pre-eminent glove producing town. There were two wonderful businesses there in the 18th century. Subsequently, we had English China Clays and some opencast mining, which assisted. Unfortunately, the glove industry has gone. Ladies and gentlemen no longer wear gloves.

At present, because mine is an agricultural constituency, much of the work that Torrington has managed to create is centred on two factories—a dairy business, which recently closed with devastating job losses, and a fresh meat company with a large abattoir, which is owned by Hillsdown Holdings.

I tell the story because it shows the harshness of successful exporting. Dartmoor hill farmers have developed a niche market for small lambs, exported live and on the hoof. Spanish, French and Italian trucks are now loading up with small lambs that weigh about 12 kilos, which is smaller than the normal size that we eat in the United Kingdom. The lambs are transported across the channel and are killed in France, Italy or Spain. They are then stamped as having originated from the country in which they were killed. It is a successful, newly created export trade that has now grown to include export of some of the lowland lambs.

Those 92 job losses in the fresh meat company derive directly from the success of the Dartmoor hill farmers and the lowland farmers in exporting live lamb on the hoof to be killed in other EC nations and stamped as having been bred there. The lambs are then purchased by housewives in those countries, whose families eat the excellent Devon lamb, fondly believing it was bred in their own country.

The result is interesting. The price of lamb is higher on the hoof than it would have been dead weight killed in the abattoirs of Torrington, which has driven up the price of lamb in the United Kingdom and successful exports mean job losses in the United Kingdom.

That story shows the complexities of industry. As much as I welcome the newcomer to the Opposition Front Bench —the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), who is a friend of mine—I regret that the formal Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, has seen fit to leave the debate. I make that not as a party point but because I want seriously to criticise some of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of manufacturing versus service industries. I took the opportunity to research his background. I would not criticise anyone who received his education at the London School of Economics, became an assistant lecturer there, and went on to become a lecturer at another university. That is nothing to rubbish but a splendid learning curve, and I honour the hon. Gentleman's achievements.

However, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the hon. Gentleman has no experience of industry. His

complete lack of experience of industry was reflected in his speech—in the lamentable ignorance he displayed of many of the subjects that he tried to discuss. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman was a lecturer in industrial relations, but, judging from his responses to the interventions of my hon. Friends, I doubt whether he has experience of industrial relations other than in negotiating the salaries of university lecturers. I feel powerfully that experience of industry is a great help when debating a subject of such enormous moment.

Whether an industry is described as being in the manufacturing or service sector is only a matter of internal definition. Those are just labels that we chose to attach to an export product at a particular moment in time. My first 10 years in business were spent in the computer industry —mainly software, and a short time in hardware. That industry has seldom needed Government intervention—and on those few occasions when it has, it proved to be ineffective. It has been a success story despite being left alone, and it is a growing success. I believe that computer software is defined as a service industry.

President Reagan said that the United States should not expect to earn its living in the world by opening doors and bowing and scraping all the time. Nor should this country. That is not my definition of a service industry. I do not believe—and this may be heresy to some hon. Members who are not present—that we can earn our living in the world by pushing up the prices of houses and selling them to each other. That is a false concept of recovery. For no other capital investment or purchase are rising prices seen as a good thing. They are bad. We should seek to keep house prices as low as possible. Judging recovery by house values, as estate agents do, is folly.

The only basis on which the United Kingdom should judge its own performance or recovery is exports. My hon. Friend the Minister pointed out the truth of that in his excellent and outstanding speech, which I warmly welcomed—though we have not yet discussed sub-post offices. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend made a first-class speech by any standard. I will make his point in another way by reminding the House that, of all nations, the United Kingdom needs a high export base. We are not blessed with magnificent natural resources. We have North sea oil, but our coal is deep and difficult to extract, and it is often difficult to obtain a competitive price for it.

As an island nation, we excelled in shipbuilding in the days long gone when ships were a primary way for moving people around. The situation is now different.

We need exports far more than most of our competitors do, and at a far higher level. Some 30 to 35 per cent. of our gross national product must be created by exports if we are to have a satisfactory balance of payments. Export trade is enormously important; it is the most fundamental trigger to recovery. It is the only valid pointer and it is the one factor which will make the United Kingdom fully competent economically and fully competitive in the international market.

Mr. Stephen: My hon. Friend referred a moment ago to the computer industry. Is not that an extremely good example of the artificial division between services and manufacturing? The writing of software is intellectual property and its export could be regarded as the export of services. The computers themselves are hardware and their export could be regarded as the export of manufactured products. In reality, they are both parts of the same integrated industry.

Miss Nicholson: I thank my hon. Friend for his perceptive comments. He mentioned the export of intellectual property. I am sure that my hon. Friends, especially the Minister, are well aware that the European Community sees the information market as being of equal value and equal importance to the physical market. Following the introduction of the Single European Act, the Brussels bureaucrats, for whom I have much respect, have set their minds to seeing how we can create a secure and yet free-market framework for the transmission of intellectual property and for the free flow of information. In other words, they have decided that the information market is as important as the physical market.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central criticised heavily Conservative Members who took the time and trouble to visit British embassies and, although he did not mention them specifically, high commissions. He implied that Conservative Members were going round the world at Government expense and that they were not doing a proper job. I am delighted to tell him that, while a Member of Parliament, I have taken the opportunity, at my own expense, to visit a number of embassies and high commissions and to discuss British exports with the commercial attaches. I have had the good fortune to see the success story that many British industries have achieved in exports.

One of the British success stories in exports that is rarely identified here is the Commonwealth Development Corporation. It is Britain's investment arm of our overseas aid effort. I stress that it is Britain's investment arm because I am well aware that our debate concerns exports and not aid. This effort has been going on since 1947 and is now working in 45 nations. It was gratifying to have the opportunity to be in Papua New Guinea and to see British machinery working on sugar plantations and palm oil plantations. It was wonderful to see the way in which British trade expertise, Government and private, blended together to offer Papua New Guinea the opportunity to build up its trade. That is an export industry which we fail to honour here as we should.

It is interesting to see the revival of a gold mine in Indonesia with British trade expertise—perhaps Department of Trade and Industry expertise in an advisory capacity. It is interesting to go to Thailand to see prawn farming and to see a huge palm oil plantation on degraded land which has allowed dispossessed peasants the opportunity to create a trade.

The United Kingdom is often wrongly criticised by ill-wishers who are British citizens for combining British trade with aid. Having seen how committed British industry workers are to the people whom they seek to serve in the poorer nations of the world, I think that it would be folly to withdraw our expertise. It would lead to the cessation of the beginnings of trade in some of the worst areas of the world that I have ever visited.

Those areas of the world are a lesson to us. In visiting factories in Indonesia or other parts of south-east Asia, the lesson that one learns is harsh: that the competition that we face far outstrips our energies and efforts. It is a shock to see people eagerly going to work in factories, where they work at two or three times the speed of factory workers in many parts of the United Kingdom. They produce goods

[Miss Nicholson]

and package and export them with delight, speed and excellence and with the benefit of a loose free-market structure.

Not for one moment do I want this country to revert to slave labour. Reference was made earlier in the debate to the reason for so many manufacturing companies—manufacturers of machine tools, manufacturing parts, clothing and footwear—having gone into decline, but the reason, surely, must be the effect that over-powerful trade unions once had on British industry. They had British industry round the throat and throttled much of it to death. That fact cannot be ignored.

We cannot pretend that two decades of over-strong unions never existed. We should not cease, therefore, to pay credit to the Conservative Government who, in successive terms of office, have altered the balance and made it possible for British industry again to export successfully.

The Government have embarked upon an excellent initiative in my constituency. I repeat that exporting plays perhaps the most important role of all in Torridge and West Devon. Before I turn to the two companies that I intend to mention briefly and ask the Minister for his comments, may I say how much I admire the Torridge district council's chief executive, Richard Brasington, and his staff for the huge efforts that they have made to link our part of Devon, Torridgeside, with a similar part of France. To build trade links at that level is an interesting initiative. It is going well, and I believe that it will bear fruit.

Many companies in that part of my constituency are exporters. The North Devon Manufacturers Association is an excellent body. One of its key members is Jamestan Engineering Ltd., whose founder chairman and chief executive is Bryan Shugar. Bryan has been discussing with me recently the new export centre that has opened just outside my constituency—but nearby, in Barnstaple—whose purpose is to assist industries in north Devon and in Torridgeside that want to do business in the European Community. He tells me that the centre is supported by the Department of Trade and Industry, North Devon county council, Torridge district council, the Devon and Cornwall TEC, whose chairman, Eric Dancer, is the chairman of Dartington Crystal, which is in my constituency, and the North Devon college—a first-class further education college.

Bryan suggests that this new initiative, the export centre, will provide an excellent opportunity for companies such as his to take the fast route into Europe as and when potential business opportunities there become available.

Mr. Shugar made another point of which, perhaps, we do not take sufficient account; certainly the hon. Member for Leeds, Central did not do so. I am referring to the peace dividend. Mr. Shugar says that there is an inevitable and rapid decline in defence spending in the south-west region. Of course, that must be so, because, otherwise, the peace dividend would be just a fiction. It is therefore all the more essential that we achieve as close commercial links as possible with Europe to ensure our future growth and prosperity.

I shall briefly describe the North Devon Export Centre. Its aim is to assist businesses, especially small businesses, in north Devon to develop profitable sales in Europe and other parts of the world. It will provide advice on the sales potential of members' products; help with locating suitable potential customers or agents; and advise on leaflet and translation needs and on documentation, freight and value added tax.

The centre will arrange meetings and seminars for members on specific European business possibilities. It will produce a broadsheet of members' products for distribution, initially in France and the Republic of Ireland. It will encourage visits to our area by European trade groups and individuals so that they may meet its members. It will develop an information section on all the DTI services, exhibitions and other relevant data. It will provide members with names of translators, freight forwarders, and so on. It will even provide members with a fax service and, if required, help with initial European and overseas mail, for which a nominal charge will be made.

It is a great pleasure to welcome the setting of the centre, which opened only on 4 May. It is very new and is looking specifically at ways to help small businesses to win business in Europe. It is supported by the DTI and the other organisations that I have already mentioned. That is the good news.

This is a good moment for the hon. Member for Leeds, Central to come back into the Chamber. I have criticised him, but now I propose to agree with him on one matter. I, too, have a shipbuilder in my constituency and I want to convey to my hon. Friend the Minister some thoughts from Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd. Its managing director, Mr. Jim Wilson, is as excellent as Mr. Bryan Shugar of Jamestan Engineering. However, his view of the Government's support for exports of British shipbuilding is not as glowing. He has the distinct impression that European shipyards—in particular, Italian, Dutch and German—have been getting more support than British yards.

Appledore has created a niche market in dredgers. Mr. Wilson cited the case of an order from Indonesia for three dredgers which was awarded to a west German shipyard that then subcontracted the work to east Germany. That is not a political statement; it is just a geographical identification. The price offered by the west German shipyard was almost twice that of Appledore, but the German Government made a financial aid offer of 25 years' credit with a holiday for the first eight years.

Mr. Wilson told me that east German shipyards receive 36 per cent. intervention funding, compared with a maximum of 9 per cent. for British yards. He asks that the Government—and, indeed, I as his Member of Parliament—insist that all shipyards build on a level sea.

Mr. Wilson gave another example. Just over a year ago, Appledore was the front runner to receive an order for a dredger from a Belgian owner. The order was blocked because the Belgian Government insisted that it be given to a Belgian shipyard. That was confirmed to him by the managing director of the Belgian shipping company. Perhaps we play too fair and we underestimate the need to be patriotic. I make that suggestion on behalf of the Appledor Shipbuilders.

In a speech last week, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said:

"Enterprising individuals are held up as role models on the basis of their record for product innovation, service

improvement or production efficiency . . . They are a testament to the system's capacity to mobilise human inventiveness, drive and originality."

It is important to encourage entrepreneurs such as Bryan Shugar and Jim Wilson by recognising the fact that, when they ask to be heard, they are not seeking major Government intervention internally in a free-market system—indeed, most senior business men I know ask that the Government leave them strictly alone—but for the Government to do their best to ensure that other Governments play by the rules that we have already accepted.

As treasurer of the Positive European group, I supported the Maastricht treaty from start to finish, and I know that it will introduce a measure of discipline. I ask the Minister to assure me that he and other Ministers will do all in their power to ensure that the Government and the Brussels bureaucrats manage to level the great unfairness that Jim Wilson has so cogently identified.

Lest the hon. Member for Leeds, Central thinks that I agree with him too much, let me tell him that when the Appledore shipyard was in public hands the work rate was much slower. As soon as it went into private hands, productivity improved immensely. For example, two dredgers were being made instead of one. That made it possible for the shipyard to compete in the wider world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have been kind enough to allow me time to speak this morning for which I am grateful on behalf of my constituents who export and those who wish to do so. I am grateful to the Minister for his work and for the effort he has made this morning. I know that he has been listening and that he will be kind enough to take my thoughts into account.

As a supporter of economic and monetary union, I was sorry that we went into the exchange rate mechanism late and dropped out when we did. Had the Opposition spokesman been more accurate in his perception of me as a woman and not as a man, I could have told him that I sought devaluation as early as February or March last year. Perhaps because of my own history in exporting, I felt that our currency was above its natural level. However, I dislike immensely the fact that we had to devalue, and I am very sorry that it was forced on us.

I look forward to the day when our exports are running so high that we shall naturally re-enter the ERM. Although I am aware that it cannot be soon, I see it on the horizon. With the ratification of the Maastricht treaty, I am confident that the various stages outlined for a single European currency and for convergence will be reached in five, six or seven years, although who knows exactly when?

Under this Government, the United Kingdom is a success story and will be successful in export terms in the future. I urge the Government to continue their good work and the Minister to take my comments on board.

12.43 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in what, it is agreed across the Floor of the House, is an extremely important debate on the Government's support for exporters. One thing for which business men have asked continually, perhaps above all else, is stability—economic stability and international stability. This morning, my hon. Friend the Minister, in response to a point of order, delivered the good news that the inflation rate has now moved to 1·3 per cent. on a yearly basis. Surely, that is the sort of good news and stability that our exporters want. I welcome that news and add it to the congratulations that I shall give my hon. Friend the Minister on the Government's other achievements in connection with the work of our exporters and support for them.

I shall refer briefly to international stability. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) spoke about the good news last night that the Maastricht Bill received its Third Reading with a good majority. I do not stand back from agreeing totally with my hon. Friend that it was necessary for the Maastricht process to continue because business and industry have been calling on the House to get on with the process—they need stability not only in Europe but in the wider world.

Time and again, we have been warned that failure to ratify the treaty would threaten the single market and the 340 million consumers who are involved in it, weaken our influence on European decisions and make us less attractive for inward investment. The advantages of ratification, which I hope we are well on course to achieving, will be enlargement of the European Community and fresh opportunities for producers to win back Europe's share of the world markets and break out of recession. I am pleased to support my hon. Friend in her remarks on the Maastricht Bill and the achievement last night.

What is more important is economic stability, a low inflation rate and international stability. After all, we can all see the appalling events that are taking place in Europe and elsewhere. All that is more important than the perhaps temporary good news about the devaluation of the pound. Obviously, it is good news for our exporters that the pound has been devalued, but I certainly put the need for economic stability and international stability well above that. I know from recent submissions that I have received from the CBI and others that responsible business people in the United Kingdom share that view.

Britain is a small island. We depend on our talent and our skill. We must interact with the outside world and we must export to survive. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) tempted me by referring to Corelli Barnett and engineering and manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom. I have taken up that theme many times in the past and I shall resist the temptation to do so today, but I was pleased that my hon. Friend briefly referred to that.

I was interested in a great deal of what the Opposition spokesman on trade and industry, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), said. During this debate, there has been a measure of cross-party agreement on manufacturing and exports. I would part company with the hon. Gentleman in only one aspect—he was a little grudging in giving credit to my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and his colleagues for the real achievements that we have made in exports. After all, my right hon. Friend said that he was fighting for Britain. The hon. Gentleman referred to my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade, who has been to China three times, and to Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Indonesia, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Belgium—just to mention a few. We must pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and his colleagues for the work that they have done in promoting exports and helping our exporters. I have felt strongly about the manufacturing industry and exports for a long time.

[Mr. Patrick Thompson]

As Britain emerges from recession, it is clear that one of the key factors in sustaining recovery will be the success of our exports. Long-term non-inflationary growth is more likely to be achieved by expanding our exports than by allowing domestic demand to grow too rapidly, thereby sucking foreign imports. It is clear from the recent high level of exports to countries outside the European Community and from the dramatic reduction in the trade deficit to £918 million last March that increased success in exports is already becoming a reality. That is a considerable achievement when many of our EC partners are still in recession and are experiencing falling demand.

I subscribe to the Martyn Lewis school of broadcasting. The more often we talk in the House about good news, the better it is for our morale and the morale of our constituents. So why should I not, with the help of a document which could even be a Conservative central office brief, remind the House that export volumes were at record level in the last quarter of 1992 in spite of the economic slowdown of our major trading partners?

Why should I not remind the House that recently United Kingdom export performance was impressive in a wide range of sectors? There were significant increases in 1992 in sectors ranging from electronics to iron and steel, and from bulk raw material to clothing and beverages. So we are building on a foundation for export-led growth. The value of visible exports to non-EC countries in the first quarter of this year was up 20 per cent. on a year ago.

I could continue with a catalogue of good news. I do not see any reason why we should not cheer ourselves up with this good news and give Martyn Lewis more food for his excellent campaign. I am, without hesitation, on Martyn Lewis's side in the matter of news coverage.

The Government already devote substantial and increasing resources to help British companies succeed in overseas markets. They have proved themselves ready to listen to the needs of businesses in our export markets. We now have commercial offices in all our embassies under the management of the joint directorate of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office. Those offices are well informed about British industry's products and the economic potential of the countries in which they serve.

The machinery that we need is in place; so are the economic incentives. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently responded to requests for support for exporters by cutting export credit premiums and extending the cover available in key markets by £1,300 million in the next three years. Exporters will also benefit from the reduction in advance corporation tax, the extension of the loan guarantee scheme, improved VAT relief for bad debts and lower rates bills.

In addition, I am pleased that the Government recognise the importance of manufacturers' exports as the cornerstone of any successful export drive. In spite of the good news, there is no room for complacency, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade recognises. In the 1980s, oil exports partly displaced manufactured goods in our balance of international trade. Now that oil production has passed its peak, an increase in the volume of manufacturing production for export is vital, as the Engineering Employers Federation has repeatedly and rightly pointed out.

My interest in engineering is well known. As a member of the all-party group on engineering development, I listen carefully to any information that comes from the engineers and manufacturers. Engineering exports have risen by more than 29 per cent. since the 1980s, but engineering imports have risen by more than 79 per cent. during the same period. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister accepts that those percentages must be reversed if there is to be a lasting revival in our country's economic fortunes.

There is a structural problem to be tackled. Engineering output grew less rapidly than the economy as a whole in the 1980s. If it is to grow more rapidly than the economy as a whole in the 1990s through export-led growth, the capacity of the financial system to fund expansion by customers and suppliers must be in place; so, too, must the capacity to produce when our key EC market revives.

Two points are vital to our future success in exports, one of which is reflected in the anxiety voiced by some of those involved with small businesses in my constituency and by Norfolk and Waveney chamber of commerce. The message has come, particularly from my area, that, despite promises made by the Department of Trade and Industry, smaller businesses are still being given a raw deal in export promotions.

I shall pick up an issue raised by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). I always have to rehearse the right hon. Gentleman's constituency so that I can refer to it when he speaks in the Chamber, and I am sorry that he is not here now to hear me get it right. I was interested in his remarks about smaller businesses and how important it is for the Department to give as much support to small businesses as to large ones. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that later, as it is not a new concern.

I know that it has long been a worry of the Government that a few large exporters account for what seems to be a disproportionately large share of exports. Last year, 50 companies were responsible for 44 per cent. of visible exports. That is why the Government continue to attempt to target export promotion at smaller companies. My constituents in Norwich who have spoken to me on the subject feel that the previous relative lack of success has been due not to a lack of will or understanding by the Government, but to the over-complex proliferation of organisations that offer advice to small companies.

At present, a small business man wishing to know more about how to break into overseas markets can receive advice from organisations including his local council, enterprise agencies, the local chamber of commerce and the local training and enterprise council. In the past, there has been little or no co-ordination in the advice offered by the different organisations and little way of knowing which advice is more accurate or authoritative. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that the Government have made much progress and I welcome that. The pumping of funds for the dissemination of information into organisations that offer conflicting advice is a waste of money and time. It dilutes funds that could be spent more effectively if focused on a single organisation offering already harassed business men clear, simple and straightforward information.

There is a feeling among local businesses and organisations that the establishment of one-stop shops will be a significant move towards solving the problem. Such shops provide a satisfactory way of combining the multiplicity of separate services that are currently

available. I believe that more emphasis could be placed on one-stop shops as local centres that can provide information and advice on exports. They could provide the much-needed link between the Department's export promotion and smaller local businesses. They would put our small firms on a more equal footing with their continental rivals by offering them easy access to services that would help to improve the quality of their products, their productivity, competitiveness and export potential.

There need not be a conflict between the priorities of helping established large exporters and helping smaller, less-experienced companies. If the Government provide more effective help to small and medium-sized businesses wanting to export, that would benefit all businesses and the country as a whole.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade recently listed three main ways in which the Government could help British trade: by creating a benign economic climate, by promoting better links between industry and education—a subject dear to my heart—and by decreasing the amount of bureaucratic red tape that still cripples competitiveness in this country. I know that progress is being made on the first two aspects, but can my hon. Friend the Minister assure me that enough progress is being made on the last one?

I served as a member of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments for a year or so before the last general election. The sheer volume of regulations that poured through that Committee was horrifying—the problem of excessive bureaucracy remains with us. There is an urgent need for further deregulation—a subject close to the hearts of a number of my colleagues. Brian Prime, the foreign affairs chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, was recently quoted in the press as saying that many British businessess felt that they were at a disadvantage to businesses in other European Community member states

"due to the heavy-handed implementation and enforcement of European legislation in the UK."

He went on to suggest that

"the British Government's priority in 1993 must be to redress this imbalance by either ensuring the interpretation of regulations is equal throughout Europe, or by adjusting the British approach to match the more relaxed style of enforcement enjoyed by competitor nations."

Mr. Prime's only mistake is that he fails to point out that not all this red tape is imported from Brussels; much of it, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade himself conceded, is self-generated.

I know that the DTI's deregulation unit is working to cut unnecessary red tape. I know from recent parliamentary answers that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs is working hard to cut unnecessary red tape, whether it emanates from Brussels or from Whitehall. The difficulty is that I am not yet convinced that we are really winning the battle.

The problem of red tape and of the ludicrous results to which it leads is well known by all hon. Members. I am sure that I need not remind my hon. Friend the Minister of the famous calculation that an average small business owner would have to read 26 booklets and nearly 270,000 words to become familiar with all the regulations affecting him. The mental effect of all that on small business owners can hardly be overestimated. The knowledge that the incorrect completion of a fiendishly difficult import-export document could result in criminal proceedings is hardly likely to foster the confidence and courage to break into foreign markets.

The burden of excessive bureaucracy falls particularly hard on smaller companies. Businesses employing fewer that 15 people spend the equivalent of 2·5 per cent. of their turnover dealing with VAT payments alone, while companies employing up to 500 people need spend only 0·07 per cent. The small business man has to be a jack of all trades; he cannot be an expert on everything. Nor can small entrepreneurs be expected to spend an infinite amount of time on form filling when the survival of their firms is at stake. The system is clearly unfair and is to the long-term detriment of us all.

I recognise that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is extremely concerned and has stated more than once that he is determined to tackle the problem once and for all. He is not, however, the first Prime Minister to attack the problem of red tape. The Government have had a deregulation initiative in place since 1985, but so far they have not succeeded in significantly reducing the constant flow of legislation and new regulations.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will provide a great deal of reassurance on this point; I hope that he will tell us that the match is even now being applied to the bonfire of regulations. If he can do that, I will be happy to support him in this, as in so much else.

The big question is: what can the Government do that will make things different this time? An excellent suggestion proposed from several quarters in recent months is that all future legislation should be drafted with a view to supervising the outcome of actions rather than policing the processes that lead to them. That simple measure would effectively reduce the need for a great deal of heavy-handed and restrictive bureaucracy.

An even more simple and effective suggestion, however, is that recently made to the press by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—no regulation should be allowed unless it can stand up to two basic tests: what cost does it impose and what are the benefits to consumers?

Red tape has been seen by previous Governments as a convenient way of tackling problems while passing the buck and handing the costs over to private businesses. That may seem like a saving in the short term for the Government, but the unseen long-term costs of such excessive regulations are immense. They are costs to exporters, too. We must not forget that this debate is about helping them.

Tackling red tape will not be easy. It is an endless task that will require many tough decisions. In the end, however, if we want to continue the fight against inflation and to improve our exports—and, ultimately, to save jobs—it is the only course open to us. I urge Ministers to continue their fight, as they call it, for Britain overseas. I congratulate the Government on their excellent progress in helping our exporters. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues to continue to deal with regulations as I have suggested. I hope that the match has already been applied.

1.4 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): No hon. Member should delude himself or herself into thinking that the success or failure of British exporters is primarily due to what Governments do or do not do. It is essentially a

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

matter for the companies themselves and it depends on the genius of their inventors, the skill of their designers, the precision of their engineers, the flair and imagination of their sales force and the competence of those who manage their finances and employee relations. There is only so much that government can do and our Government are doing it.

The value of the pound is crucial to exporters and I welcome its present competitiveness in world markets. That is of great benefit to our exporters because British goods are now much cheaper to foreign customers than for many years. The other side of the coin is that it is now much more attractive for British people to buy British goods. That applies not just to tangible exports and imports, but to services.

I have the honour to represent a constituency on the Sussex coast which, to some extent, depends on tourism for its livelihood. I am glad that it will now be much cheaper for British people to spend their holidays with us on the Sussex coast than to go to other countries.

As I have said, the value of the pound is crucial to our exporters. The most serious mistake we made for many years was entering the exchange rate mechanism. Before Opposition Members seek to draw any satisfaction from that, I say immediately that Labour and Liberal Democrat Members were much more enthusiastic than Conservative Members about joining the ERM. The problem with the ERM was that it was a wholly artificial system. It was doomed to failure from the beginning, as King Canute would have told told us if he were still alive. It is not without interest that he was a Dane.

The exchange rate mechanism was fundamentally flawed because the value of a nation's currency depends on the decisions of millions of economic decision-makers all over the world. They send signals about what they think of an economy and its management by the Government. To try to distort those signals is rather like fiddling with the oil pressure gauge on a motor car when the gauge shows that something is wrong with the engine. The right thing to do is to attend to the engine.

I do not regard the day of our leaving the ERM as black Wednesday but as golden Wednesday because it gave us the opportunity to adjust our economy to world realities and not to some artificial system. The ERM was sought to be justified on the ground that it was a necessary discipline to control inflation. I have never thought much of that argument. It is rather like saying that the British Government are a set of lunatics who have to be put in protective custody because they cannot be trusted to behave sensibly on their own. That is not the case, because our Government can be trusted to manage the economy sensibly now that we have freed ourselves from the artificial constraints to which we were subjected.

Labour says that it would have devalued within the ERM much earlier, but devalued to what rate? It is almost certain that whatever rate was chosen would have been wrong because economies are dynamic: they change from day to day and from week to week. Whatever rate was decided would have been wrong. We would probably have fixed too low a rate and, as a result, to prevent our currency going through the ceiling of the band, we would have had to pitch interest rates far too low for our internal economic circumstances, and that might have fuelled inflation. Devaluing within the ERM goes against the point of having an exchange rate mechanism, which is intended to fix exchange rates within a narrow band. If one keeps devaluing down or revaluing up, that makes nonsense of the whole idea, but then it was nonsense anyway.

As a result of our coming out of the ERM, we have been able to manage our economy according to our domestic circumstances and I share the welcome that my hon. Friends have given to the extremely good news that inflation has dropped to 1·3 per cent. That is crucial to our exporters. One of the reasons why they have not done very well in the past 10 to 20 years is that inflation—particularly unit wage cost inflation—has priced our goods out of world markets. That is why we were unable to compete with other countries, particularly those of the Pacific rim.

Exit from the ERM has also enabled us to bring interest rates down to manageable levels, and that is of crucial importance to our exporters. Low rates of tax are of great benefit as well and I am glad that we have one of the lowest rates of corporation tax in the developed world. A flat low rate of corporation tax is the best way to proceed, rather than going in for the kind of gimmicks advocated by the Labour party, such as elaborate capital allowances which are open to abuse.

As to regulation, I entirely agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson). I am afraid that regulation is one of the greatest burdens of British industry and commerce. That is why I am so glad that the Government have taken such a firm stand against importing the social chapter. One can see the results of it in France and Germany, where it renders many of their industries uncompetitive. If that is what they want, let them have it, but we are not having it here.

We want the ability to be flexible and to respond to changing economic circumstances, and to give our managers the right and confer upon them the duty to work with their employees to produce the desired result. They should not be constrained by a remote bureaucratic system telling them what they can and cannot do. For example, there should be no imposition of a minimum wage.

Every hon. Member wants to see workers remunerated fairly for what they do, but what would be the result of telling a small business man that he must pay his people a minimum wage? If he is an honest business man, as most of them are, he would say, "I cannot afford it. My business will not sustain those burdens. If you insist that I pay my workers a minimum wage, I shall have to sack some of them." We do not want that. We have far too much unemployment already. If we were to accept the Opposition's argument, unemployment would go up, not down.

I also pay tribute to the sterling work of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who has been cutting through red tape. I can think of nobody better qualified to do that job. He has my full support and I am sure that of all Conservative Members. I sometimes see a gleam in the eye of civil servants when one mentions deregulation, because they think that they can create a new Department staffed by a couple of dozen civil servants to manage the process. I am sure that that has not escaped the notice of my hon. Friend.

Education is of great importance to our exporters as well. As I visit exporting businesses in my constituency and elsewhere, I am told of the lamentable quality of education

in our state system. They say that they have to provide remedial education when they receive young people from our schools at the age of 16.

That is why I strongly support the courageous efforts of the Secretary of State for Education and his predecessors to do something about that appalling problem.

There are teething troubles in every endeavour. Perhaps there might not have been so many if, with the benefit of hindsight, we had set about the process in a somewhat different way. We have been let down by the educationists who were relied on by Ministers to produce a workable system of testing—but we can debate that matter on another occasion.

I have some experience of the countries of the Pacific rim. I am impressed when I visit them to see their young people queuing up, eager for education, waiting for their schools to open. By comparison, many of our youngsters have to be dragged to school. That is a sad state of affairs.

Reference was made earlier in the debate to the reasons for the decline of some of our great industries. I strongly believe that the decline of the motor and machine tool industries and the shipyards was due in part to the restrictive practices—strikes, general disruption and unco-operative attitude—of the representatives, sometimes self-appointed, of the work force throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Looking back nearly 30 years, I vividly remember the demarcation disputes of the 1960s in the shipyards.

There are, of course, other factors. Hon. Members have pointed out that many more goods are transported by air and road than was previously the case. Many more people travel by air than by sea these days. But the principal reason, in so far as it was within our control, for the decline of those great industries was bad industrial relations. I am glad that under the Prime Minister and his predecessor, we have now got the position right. I hope that Mr. Knapp and his friends in the Rail, Maritime and Transport union are taking note of this debate and appreciate their responsibilities in relation to the future economic well-being of the nation.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) said that the decline of the machine tool industry was not due to poor industrial relations because of the timing. That is wrong, because there are long lead times in industry. If things were going wrong in the 1960s and 1970s, we would expect them to be working through, resulting in a serious decline in the industry as a whole, in the 1980s and 1990s.

It is sometimes suggested by Labour Members that the Government must intervene when industries, especially those which export, are failing. I recall what happened when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) tried to intervene in the affairs of the Meriden motor cycle company. That was a total waste of taxpayers' money.

I also remember—I do not make a party political point because we have also been guilty—the fiasco of Mr. De Lorean in Northern Ireland. Those two examples, and we need no others, should warn of the dangers of politicians and civil servants trying to second-guess business men and interfere in what is essentially the business of business.

Most British companies, many in my constituency, are excellent at their job. I am constantly amazed when I visit them by their technical skill and inventive genius. I shall mention a few because I am proud of them. Link Miles makes amazingly sophisticated computer-driven simulators for the airlines and air forces of the world. Because the people whom they supply have been undergoing serious economic decline, the company's exports have suffered. But it is coming through well and has products that are world beaters.

I also have in my constituency a company called Ricardo Consulting Engineers. It is a world leader in automotive engine design. Its British engineers in Shoreham are designing engines for the motor manufacturers of the world, including those of Japan.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that I motor cycled—I would rather use the expression "motorbiked" since that is what true motor cyclists would say—to Turkey? Although I must admit that I used a Japanese motorbike, a Yamaha FJ1200, it was designed by a British company.

Mr. Stephen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I should not be surprised if it had been designed by one of my constituents.

A company in my constituency called ECC Simulations makes systems for training people to maintain military and other vehicles. It also produces a marvellous simulated device, which it has sold in large numbers to the Swiss Army for training people who guard their mountain passes. Another company, Edwards Hi-Vac, exports high vacuum pumps. Its pumps are so sophisticated that they can create not only a vacuum where there is no air but a vacuum where there are no molecules.

Eschmann Brothers also are at the leading edge of exporting hospital technology. Before I visited the company, I did not know that there was such a thing as a high-tech operating table, but there is. It is made in my constituency and it is exported to hospitals throughout the world.

I was honoured that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was able to visit companies in my constituency last week which manufacture goods for the defence sector. Also, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Technology, who is in his place, was kind enough to meet representatives last night of local business, commerce and the professions from my constituency. It is important that those people should feel that Ministers are prepared to listen to what they have to say and to learn from their experiences, as my hon. Friend did last night.

The domestic base is extremely important for any exporter, especially in defence. I want to make three short points to the Minister. I made one of them and tried to make the other two in the defence debate the other day. First, the costs of bidding for a defence contract are very high and we must reduce them because they are an almost impossible burden on medium-size businesses. Secondly, we must make it clear that where there is a requirement for training aids—possibly simulator aids for new aircraft being built by the prime contractor—and where the prime contractor is also bidding for the subsidiary contract, the prime contractor must not be judge and jury in his own cause or have an unfair advantage.

Thirdly, as other hon. Members have said, we must make it clear that we are not prepared to tolerate indirect subsidies being granted by other countries to their own manufacturers, and we must fight very hard on behalf of British exporters to ensure the proverbial level playing field. Hon. Members have mentioned the case of steel and Italy, but there are many other examples.

[Mr. Stephen]

Here I pay tribute to a former right hon. Member, Sir Leon Brittan, for the excellent work that he did as Competition Commissioner in stamping out such nonsense in the European Community. I wish him well with the general agreement on tariffs and trade. We could not have a better man in that position.

It is important that Ministers give political help to our exporters, and I was glad to hear of the excellent work that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did in India. I also pay tribute to the work that our noble Friend Baroness Thatcher did throughout her term in office to help our exporters to sell their wares throughout the world.

Also of interest is the extent to which gas, water and electricity companies are participating in exports and winning contracts all over the world. This is a great tribute to the outward-looking management attitudes seen since denationalisation.

In defence, export licences are a problem, but after examples such as the Iraq supergun affair and the like, one must not minimise the importance of ensuring that export licences are fully considered by all the Departments concerned. However, I urge the Government to streamline the system, so that potential exporters are not kept waiting many months for licences.

Defence spending is being cut in this and many other countries—and rightly so, because what is the point of winning the cold war if one does not then reduce defence spending? There is a need for diversification and I make that point whenever I visit defence contractors in my constituency. They are well aware of the need to diversify and they are doing so. Companies that used to make combat aircraft simulators are perfectly capable of manufacturing simulators for drivers of trains or heavy goods vehicles and for many other applications. Their efforts would not be much helped by establishing a quango of the kind proposed by the Labour party.

There will always be a need for defence in the world —although I hope at a much reduced level—so there remains a demand for our exporters fully to participate in defence markets. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) remarked that it is bad for this country to export munitions to others because they might be used against our own soldiers and he gave one or two examples. I used to be a soldier and I would much rather be on the receiving end of British munitions —especially sophisticated weaponry such as missiles— because I would know more about them and their capabilities than about the munitions supplied by another country. During the Falklands war, we knew—because our French friends were good enough to tell us—more about the capabilities of the Exocet than did the people who were using them against us, which was most valuable.

It is not just the physical product that is important in exports—the financial package is almost more so. British banks are good at dealing with large-scale projects. In the City of London, there are several excellent merchant banks staffed with the brightest and most imaginative people one could hope to find. However, in the middle range, when exporters have to approach clearing banks they do not find such an imaginative approach.

I urge British exporters who cannot secure the right financial package from British clearing banks to take their custom elsewhere—even if that means to Zurich or Geneva. It is crucial that British exporters should be able to assemble the right financial package. Perhaps as a result of such competition, British clearing banks will wake up and change their ideas. I have been invited to visit the regional business centre of one of the clearing banks near my constituency and I shall have some questions to put. I hope that other hon. Members will do the same.

It strikes me as odd that if one wants to buy a house, one can borrow the money from a bank over a term of 25 years at a competitive interest rate—but if one wants the same amount of money for business against the security of that house, the bank will offer a repayment term of only three or four years and it might even say that the money is repayable on demand. The bank will almost certainly say that the interest rate will be much greater than for buying a house. That seems entirely wrong.

We have tended to encourage—and my party must accept any blame that may be attached to it for this—far too high a proportion of our national wealth to be put into bricks and mortar than into manufacturing and exporting.

I was glad to hear that an extra £2 billion has been put into the Export Credits Guarantee Department. That is crucial. If there is any truth in the remarks by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale about the current administration of the ECGD, the company operating it should be sacked and we should find a company that is capable of doing the job properly. I am as much in favour of privatisation as is any of my hon. Friends, but the corollary is that private companies undertaking work on behalf of the public service should be held to high standards. We should not tolerate the unimaginative attitudes and inefficiency which were so characteristic of the public sector.

I have visited many of our embassies and I have been impressed by the people I have met. However, one still too often hears of British exporters going to a British embassy and just being given a list of suppliers or retailers which they could have got themselves from the public library. That is not what is wanted. When a British exporter goes to one of our embassies or high commissions, he wants the benefit of the detailed local knowledge that the officers should possess applied to his particular problem. There is nothing wrong with asking British exporters to pay something for the services they receive from our missions abroad. We all know that we do not really value something that we get for nothing and that we tend to use it whether we need it or not. If one has to pay some of one's own cash, one thinks about whether the service will be really needed and valued.

I echo the remarks made by other hon. Members about the need to firm up our representation in eastern Europe. It is a critical growth area on our own continent and we must be in there fighting 100 per cent. for the business that is available.

I am glad that the DTI has taken on people from industry who know all about exporting. They will be able to bring a business man's mind to solving business men's problems. I was pleased to hear that the CBI has congratulated the Government on their export services. One-stop shops are an excellent idea, as it makes no sense for six or seven different organisations to offer services to small business men. The small firms merit award for research and technology—SMART—is to be commended because it encourages innovation. Also in my area, the Federation of Sussex Industries has an excellent computer

database which provides detailed and well-tailored information to local Sussex business men who wish to export.

Trade fairs are important and I am glad that the Government have given financial assistance to more than 7,000 British exporters so that they have been able to attend more than 300 events in the past year. I do not think, however that it should be an open-ended commitment, as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale suggested. Once the Government have assisted a British exporter to go to two or three international trade fairs, that should be it. During that time, the exporter should have built up his own contacts with people in the country concerned and he should be able to stand alone. The scarce money should then be made available to other exporters who have not had the benefit of exploring that market.

We have a long tradition of trade; we are a nation which lives by trade. We export one quarter of all that we produce, which is quite phenomenal. That is a higher percentage of GDP than is the case for Japan and it is because we live by trade that it makes no sense to talk in protectionist terms, as Opposition Members often do. It makes no sense to ban imports. If we ban imports, how can we expect other countries to buy our goods? That is why it is so important for the GATT talks to succeed.

Overseas aid is also important. There are two dimensions to it. One is the sense of moral obligation that those of us who are fortunate enough to live in developed countries must have towards those who live in undeveloped countries. We must help them, because they are fellow human beings.

That is not entirely altruistic, for we are seeking to help those people to develop their natural and human resources and turn their economies into ones that are then able to afford goods that British manufacturing industry can produce. I am not a great believer in export awards. I believe that they are gimmicks. A well-established pattern during the past 20 to 30 years has been that of a business starting up with two men and a dog in a garage. After it becomes successful, it moves to bigger premises, wins the Queen's award for industry and then calls in the receiver. The only reward that a successful British business man really needs is the bottom line of his profit and loss account.

When I carried out research into the figures, I was pleased to see that our exports were up by 3·5 per cent. in 1992. That is no mean achievement when one considers that the western world is going through the worst economic recession for more than 60 years. Also, when speaking of the export earnings of British industry, let us not forget the export earnings of those parts of British industry located abroad. Strange though it it may seem, British companies own a higher proportion of the United States economy than United States companies own of the British economy. People such as Lord Hanson and Lord White who operate out of the United States are earning large sums of money for Britain.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that the Pig Improvement Company of Abingdon flies its animals all over the world in the service of British exports, which proves to those of us who doubted it that pigs can fly.

The trade surplus in television sets is something of which we should be more aware than we are. We should not deceive ourselves into thinking that just because a television set has a foreign name on it, it has been made abroad. Most of the television sets we use in this country are now made here and we export more television sets than we import. Furthermore, 50 per cent. of all personal computers bought in this country are made here.

Nor must we forget the invisible earnings of the City of London. The financial and legal expertise of the City of London has for centuries earned millions and millions of pounds for the British Exchequer.

I was sorry during the debate on the new Criminal Justice Bill to hear that, yet again, we are to load down the financial institutions of the City of London with more and more criminal offences and more and more regulations, which are extremely expensive to comply with. When we introduce new legislation we should consider the costs of implementing it, compared with the benefits. Sometimes the benefits are marginal.

I congratulate the Government on their positive and practical approach to British exporters, but I have to contrast their attitude with that of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats. I listened with care to the speech of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), and found it depressing. It was very long on complaints and criticism but very short on constructive proposals.

Of course it is the business of the Opposition to oppose, but opposition does not mean just saying, "You lot have done it wrong", which is almost all that we ever hear from our friends opposite. What the British people expect the Opposition to do is to come forward with constructive proposals for tackling the serious problems that we all face. We have heard nothing, and we hardly ever do hear anything, constructive from the Opposition parties. They are all too ready to carp and criticise and, as a new Member of Parliament, I am, frankly, appalled by their antics, especially at Prime Minister's Question Time.

When we have an opportunity, as we do today from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm, seriously and constructively to debate what can be done to help British exporters, the Opposition are not here. Only one Labour Member is in the Chamber and there are now no Liberal Democrats at all. We all have constituency engagements on Fridays and I should like to be in my constituency today, but it is extremely important for my constituents, and especially the manufacturing companies in my constituency, that I should be here today to represent their interests. I am pleased to have been able to do so.

1.40 pm

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): It is a happy sign that this is 1993 and we are debating a motion that is so extraordinarily skewed. If we cast our minds back to the 1960s—the intellectual epoch of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett)—we would indeed have been discussing the balance of trade and, no doubt, talking about the restriction on or substitution of imports. Happily, in 1993, due to Europe and GATT, the prohibition of imports is illegal. It is the growth, which is so much in British national interests, of the free, open, international market, which is the striking achievement of the age and the one on which our prosperity so fundamentally depends.

Let us not forget that it was the Conservative Governments of the 1980s who recreated the great free trade epoch of the Victorian period. There was the abolition of exchange controls—it was the British

[Mr. Roger Evans]

Government who started that in Europe; freedom of credit, so that people are no longer rationed and in a queue for funding to buy a house, or whatever; and privatisation of failing, loss-making, state-owned industries. That is the transformation of the world economy, and ours, in the 1990s which provides the opportunities for our exporters.

One might have thought that some semblance of the realisation that the world has changed would have hit the Labour party. As my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) said, there might have been some understanding of that. Is not it the duty of an Opposition to understand and explain in a way better and more convincing than any offered from the Conservative Benches? But what do we hear? It was an old-fashioned analysis of the balance of payments. When uncomfortable little matters of fact were put to the hon. Gentleman, I received only in return a discourteous and irrelevant observation about Robert Maxwell, a deceased member of his party, not ours.

What was wrong with the approach taken by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central? Did not he listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) explain the problems of filling in one of the Board of Trade forms about exports? Can there be anything more untrustworthy, more fundamentally in the tradition of Attleean Whitehall, than the compilation of our trade statistics? They simply no longer reflect the real world in which we live.

Let us be quite clear. We heard from the hon. Gentleman about a supposed balance of payments deficit. The actual unaccounted for figure in the published statistics of £30 billion is in fact considerably greater. The balance of payments statistics for the principal world economies do not add up. There is an enormous gap that makes a whole nonsense of the statistics. However, perhaps the most fundamental error in that approach is that the Department of Trade and Industry statistics do not allow for the capital growth of British investments overseas. It is simply a year-on statistic, out of date when it is published, inaccurate in its composition because of the very limits of knowledge and the way in which it is compiled, and which, at the end, does not adequately reflect the earnings either of British owned companies in America or the staggering capital growth in British overseas investments in the 1980s, before the recession.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central, drawing from a faulty analysis, drew the conclusion that a long, continuing balance of payments problem in this country would cause financial problems. I suggest that the currency markets and the City of London have long used a much more sophisticated and relevant intellectual analysis. In the free, open, international market, it is more important to consider the profits of British industry, the income of people in this country and the standard of living.

If one were to proceed to a more sophisticated and relevant analysis, one would go on to say that, if we are to help exports and to promote the free, international, open market, we must overcome the obstacles that have arisen since 1914 in the form of the lack of an international currency and which remain the biggest intellectual challenge to greater prosperity. We cannot return to the gold standard, but the attempt in the European Community to create a free and easily tradeable currency, which would enable everything to be denominated in the same unit, has failed. It is unfortunate that it failed, but that is the important intellectual, policitical and economic issue of the day, and it would be helpful if the Labour party dealt with it seriously.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with the Prime Minister's comments to rejoin the ERM?

Mr. Evans: "What ERM?" would be the question that the Prime Minister would rightly ask and which I put to the hon. Gentleman. Until 1989, the ERM was extremely successful in suppressing inflation in western Europe and it introduced a certain stability to odd currencies such as the guilder, which were previously rather Latin American. It was a thoroughly desirable process, but it went wrong with the sudden collapse of Soviet communism, the reunification of Germany and Chancellor Kohl's decision to reconstruct in the east without paying for it from taxation. That may have been an understandable political decision, but, once an enormous deficit is run on the fiscal arrangements of the new German state, and bearing in mind that the Bundesbank has a duty under constitutional law to limit growth in the money supply, German interest rates became excessively high which damaged the French economy and was certainly damaging ours. In the interests of Europe, it was necessary to influence our partners and suggest that something better could be done. The bold attempt did not succeed, and it was not the failure of this Government but that of our partners.

If it were a case of re-entering an ERM with interest rates at 8 or 9 per cent., I would be resolutely opposed to it. The intellectual and political challenge is to set up a system to resolve the problems that brought down the previous experiment. That is the issue of the day. It is why the provisions of the Maastricht treaty to control the new European financial institutions, based on sound money, are so important. However, it is not only in the interests of our exporters that we need to solve the problem.

If we are to understand the problems of trade, we need to understand the implications of the free, open, international market which is the striking feature of our era; but, again, the Labour party has failed to produce an analysis of the changing circumstances. The interesting feature of this trade cycle is that it appears to be much more influenced by fluctuations in credit than the traditional trade cycle, which was principally influenced by manufacturing stocking and destocking. It may be that the implications of freedom of credit and of the abolition of exchange controls go very much further than appears to have been misunderstood so far.

The debate is about promoting British trade overseas. In 1993, we should not churlishly denounce our fellow countrymen who buy Japanese computers and Korean electronic equipment. Our increased standard of living has been achieved partly by the breaking down of trade barriers and by the opportunity to buy more cheaply a much wider range of electronic goods. There are occasions when one buys British. But the reason to buy British is when it is best, not simply due to some racist chauvinist folk memory that sits ill in the mouth of the Labour party.

Let us take it a stage further. When we get to the question of consumer recovery, it will be a question of rational choices being made. In the same way, business men will want from politicians and my hon. Friend the Minister not the resolution of their problems but practical day-to-day assistance to protect their trade abroad. The

crude old-fashioned use of the balance of payments statistics, which we heard from the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, is inappropriate in the 1990s as a serious intellectual economic analysis.

It is useful to advertise to our business men that there may be areas in which there are opportunities to expand the amount of British trade. Let us be clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) said, certain British industries cannot compete with cheap labour in the far east. Nor should we attempt to compete in those areas unless we can introduce a level of technological advance and capital expenditure that enables us to make them high-value industries. Business men make sensible and rational decisions to exploit the opportunities and should not be biased by misguided political intervention.

Above all, the manufacturing/non-manufacturing dichotomy is such a striking old-fashioned misunderstanding of the modern era. I entirely endorse the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) that the old-fashioned analysis simply does not apply to the computer industry where software houses are now apparently regarded as a service sector. It used to be said:

"What is good for General Motors is good for the United States of America."

Do we realise that the stock market value of General Motors is now less than that of MicroSoft, the software house? That is the striking transformation of the American economy. It started to move into continuing world superiority in the Microsoft area barely 12 or 15 years ago.

Business men need the opportunities, but they are the judges of them. The free open market has already changed British industry and is bringing back the opportunities that we lost in the 1960s and 1970s. I feel for my hon. Friend the Minister visiting horrible parts of the world such as Paraguay and Argentina. They are classic examples of tyrannical socialist inbred societies, which have opened up in the modern world under the influence of the Conservative Government. With protectionism, they discovered——

Sir David Steel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Evans: No, I am about to finish. The fundamental test—I find this deeply shocking from a Liberal—of a liberal open economy is free trade and open markets. The late Mr. Gladstone would have understood that, if not the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). The point at stake is that the failure catastrophically of the Latin American economies in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was rampant protectionism, state intervention and the fact that they were not open to the world economy, as Argentina had been before the first world war in its better and happier phase.

When one opens up industry and business to competition, British industry turns round and wins. That is why we have seen the car industry go from being on its knees in the 1970s to a position where we will have a surplus on car exports within about a year. It is why, despite sneers at the Koreans, the United Kingdom manufactures about half of the personal computers sold in the European Community and the computer press in the United Kingdom is so much more sophisticated in the volume and range of what it covers, compared to what one can buy in France.

Free, open and fair trade built our prosperity in the 19th century and free, open international trade will fund our prosperity in the next century. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on what he is doing. I conclude with this final thought. I congratulate my right hon. Friend reviving that ancient dignified title, the President of the Board of Trade. However, I suggest that my hon. Friend the Minister should carry to my right hon. Friend the President this message: may the Board of Trade meet in full plenary session—the Archbishop of Canterbury might lend some moral authority for the importance of promoting British trade.

1.54 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Before my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) goes off to summon the Board of Trade, I should like to make a brief speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) has dubbed this the Martyn Lewis debate. I am sure that if we were able to look up we would see the Press Gallery packed with correspondents who have noted the subject of this debate and, therefore, know that good news is coming! They are here to report our every word and the catalogue of success of my hon. Friend the Minister. That is also why the Opposition Benches are packed, as we can see, with Labour Members who have come to support British success!

The Labour party told us how important the Maastricht treaty was. The treaty had significance for British exports. The Labour party explained that there could not be a referendum on Maastricht because the matter should be left to Parliament to decide. Labour Members came here in great numbers yesterday. The charabancs arrived and Labour Members poured out. They sat on the Opposition Benches and decided to abstain——

Mr. Stephen: In person.

Mr. Bowis: —in person, as my hon. Friend says. Today the charabancs have left and the abstention is without even the presence.

Meanwhile, with the distinguished exception of the Ettrick shepherd—the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who speaks for the Liberal party—only Conservative Members have spoken in the debate. My hon. Friends from north, south, east, west, the midlands, Wales and London have contributed to the success story.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we should be proud of the success story, salute the record levels of exports, particularly from the end of last year into this year, and draw comparisons with our competitors in Europe, Japan and America. We should be proud of that success, but we should not be complacent. That is why we are here to spur on British exports. We are also here to ensure that the level playing fields—or the level seas referred to earlier—are achievable.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) said, it is industry which exports, not the Government. Industry provides the quality, the price and the after-sales service. It markets its goods and services around the world. The Government can remove obstacles and help to provide the information at home and abroad. It can also help with marketing.

[Mr. Bowis]

Sometimes we should consider what exports are. They are not necessarily things wrapped up in packing cases and shipped out from Britain. Invisible exports are, be definition, not too visible. Often, services provided in Britain for overseas buyers are equally part of our exports. So, too, increasingly is the success story of inward investment, which is bringing former competitors from abroad to produce their goods here and re-export.

Sometimes one looks at a product and wonders whether it is possible to distinguish the home-produced bits from the imported bits. The last time I went to purchase a car I was shown two cars—one which I thought was British and the other which I thought was European. I was mulling it over. The salesman could see what I was up to. He said, "I know why you are hesitating. You think that this is a British car and that one is not. You are wrong. There are more British components in that car than in this car."

More and more companies are coming to Britain, including Nissan and Bosch. Bosch products are no longer manufactured in Germany. They are produced only here and in Spain. So Bosch is now British. That may come as a surprise to our German friends, but it is true.

Mr. French: Is my hon. Friend aware that there are British manufactured goods which the manufacturer or distributor deliberately chooses to give a Japanese trade name? For example, Saisho and Matsui videos are sourced in Britain by a British company, Dixons, but deliberately given a Japanese name in the belief that that will enhance the appeal to the purchaser.

Mr. Bowis: My hon. Friend has made a good point, but I am not sure what he makes of the name Brother—perhaps it is a Japanese attempt to sell goods to trade union members.

Many interesting and important issues have been raised, particularly on behalf of smaller firms. There have been calls for the need to continue the fight against regulation—for a bonfire of regulations to which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North wanted to set a match. We constantly need to look for the fiche d'impact, which is not a cod that has bumped into Brighton pier, but a way in which to ensure that the impact on small firms is kept under control.

We must be constantly aware of the needs of small firms and support them in exporting goods. My hon. Friend's Department does a great job in assisting small firms in my constituency, particularly those in specialist markets such as fashion, handbags and belts. Small firms in south London that employ only a few people cannot, on their own, take those products around the world, but, with the support of the Department of Trade and Industry, they are able to go to some of the trade fairs, exhibit their products and, we hope, sell out of them. Such action leads to greater employment and exports.

The sum of those small firms creates the success of our exports. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue to provide a flexible response to the needs of small firms through fairs, missions and the excellent idea of the video link to assist small firms in reaching overseas agents in overseas markets.

I also hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will continue to look for new markets. The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale mentioned Africa, and I am particularly thinking of African markets. Export tables show that Africa, below the Sahara, and south America do not feature, but they should do so. I visited Namibia before it gained independence. There was a great trade fair full of Japanese and German manufactured goods, but there were no British products available. Britain enters the markets late—often too late. Scotch whisky and some soap powders, made under licence, have arrived in Eritrea, the newest African country, but already the Japanese, Italian and German markets are making the running. We must encourage and enable our industries to reach those markets. We must assist them by easing the debt burden on such countries so that they can afford to trade.

When my hon. Friend the Minister considers whether British time should be altered, he must bear in mind that, according to the financial markets, our one hour advantage enables them to reach the far east ahead of their competitors. We should not tamper with British time until we are certain that to do so would produce an economic benefit.

When my hon. Friend considers the tourist industry, he should bear in mind problems such as those faced by the Savoy hotel as covered in the press today. It has lost £1 million because of regulations from Brussels. He must ensure that such niggling and costly regulations are removed.

We must carry on encouraging the arts. My hon. Friend referred to the excellent export work of the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. I know from working on the boards of the Royal National Theatre and the South Bank Centre that such companies have been able to take British excellence abroad, and both perform abroad and encourage people to come to this country to see those excellent performances.

We must use English as the medium to encourage other countries to become closer to us culturally. They will then trade more closely with us. But we must not forget the need for people in this country to learn foreign languages. Sometimes when employees in foreign companies learn English it allows them to export more products to this country than we export to theirs. It is crucial for us to learn foreign languages.

One of the great achievements of Maastricht in relation to exports has been to ensure that, in future, Community countries that sign regulations must uphold them. The non-compliance of the past has militated against British exports. Maastricht will help British exporters to achieve equality of opportunity and that, combined with the excellent work being done in the Board of Trade, will lead Britain to greater success.

2.4 pm

Mr. Leigh: With the leave of the House, I should like to say a word or two only, because I see that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) is here and I want to give her some time to speak.

We have had a good debate lasting some four and a half hours. It has ranged widely from the steamy water fronts of Paraguay to the teeming bazaars of Hong Kong——

Sir David Steel: Socialist Paraguay.

Mr. Leigh: To some. We all want to pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman for his lonely battle to raise the standard for all the Opposition parties in this debate. As always, we listened with care to his authoritative speech. Perhaps he will write to me about NCM—he felt that the companies in his constituency were not getting a good enough service. As he rightly said, we should not bandy the names of companies across the Floor of the House, but generally our market testing shows that companies welcome the increased flexibility and more comprehensive range of services that they are receiving from NCM.

The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned the rule about the number of times someone can be subsidised to attend a trade fair. The purpose of the subsidy, of course, is to encourage companies to gain a foothold. He aslo talked about the importance of DTI staff being seconded to overseas embassies. We are aware of that and are always trying to increase their numbers. We all thank the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution, and I hope that I have answered some of his points.

The only other Opposition Member to speak today was the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) who played the part of Jeremiah. He was not prepared to be the Martyn Lewis of the morning. He is starry eyed about the 1960s. He forgets that we were subsidising loss-making nationalised industries to the tune of £2 billion. Now those same industries contribute an equal sum to our economy. He ignored the fact that our balance of trade has been deteriorating, not for 14 years, but for generations. He ignored the transformation of our economy and the fact that export volumes and earnings are at record levels.

I thank all Conservative Members who have taken part in the debate—my hon. Friends the Members for Gloucester (Mr. French), for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen), for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Mr. Hawksley), for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) and for Monmouth (Mr. Evans). In their excellent speeches they concentrated on the work that my Department is doing to reorganise itself and become an effective voice for exporters.

Many of my hon. Friends mentioned the fact that we have increased ECGD cover by £2 billion. We are increasingly relying on industrial secondees who are experienced in the markets of the future. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth said in an excellent speech, our whole trading position has been transformed in recent years. So much of what the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said looked back to the past.

We are now part of a successful and growing single market. I assure the House that we shall redouble our efforts to achieve a successful negotiation of the GATT Uraguay round. On it depends our future prosperity.

Finally, I hope that this debate will be remembered for the fact that, in the middle of it, the Department of Employment announced that inflation is now down to 1·3 per cent. a year, the lowest rate in my lifetime. That shows the success of our economic policies and the steadfast pursuit by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of policies that will ensure that in the race between nations this country becomes increasingly competitive. Helped by my Department, we will ensure that we increase our exports to the world.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 8th June, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Speaker shall not later than Seven o'clock put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Northern Ireland (Emergency and Prevention of Terrorism Provisions) (Continuance) Order 1993.

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 8th June, the Speaker shall not later than one and a half hours after the first such Motion has been entered upon put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. John Smith relating to Legal Aid and Advice (Northern Ireland), namely the Question already proposed from the Chair; and the said proceedings may be entered upon or continued after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Racial Violence

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Arbuthnot.]

2.9 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): In speaking about racial violence, I shall deal with the issues arising from the recent brutal killing of the black schoolboy Stephen Lawrence in south-east London.

The black men and women who came to this country in the 1950s and 1960s went through difficult times and had to work hard to keep themselves and their families together. They always believed and kept themselves going with the notion that, for their children, times would be better. Classically, the hope of the immigrants, whether black, Jewish, Somali or Turkish, down the ages has been invested in their children.

Therefore, the recent spate of killings of black school children in south-east London and the killing of Stephen Lawrence in particular is distinctly cruel. Black school children are being slaughtered in a way that makes it look as if society is throwing a community's hopes back in its face.

I shall not speak in detail about the Stephen Lawrence case because it is sub judice, but I stress that his killing was not the result of gang warfare or of some long-running feud between rival adolescents. He was an innocent schoolboy waiting at a bus stop when he was stabbed to death by a gang of six white youths. He was the type of young man that we all want our children to be. He was ambitious and studying at schools for seven GSCEs and wished to become an architect. He was from an exemplary, hard-working and dignified black family.

Since the killing, there has been much talk about how political activists have exploited the case. Before the community became involved and people started to organise and march, it seems that the killing was being ignored, especially by the media. I extend to Stephen Lawrence's family my commiserations and I thank Nelson Mandela, the head of the African National Congress in South Africa, for taking the trouble when visiting England a few weeks ago to visit the Lawrence family. From speaking to that family, I know that they found that visit highly inspirational.

The killing of Stephen Lawrence would be bad enough if it were an isolated incident, but it came on top of a spate of killings of young black men in that area. In February 1991, 15-year-old Rolan Adams was stabbed. In May 1991, 25-year-old Orville Blair was stabbed, and in July 1992, 16-year-old Rohit Duggal was stabbed just 200 yards from where Stephen Lawrence was to be stabbed a few months later.

Those killings are just part of a national pattern of racial harassment and violence. In Hackney in my constituency, not a week goes by without people coming to see me about the racial harassment and violence that they are suffering. All the time, I see people who are frightened to leave their homes. Many of them are women and children, and they are being spat on and abused and their flats and houses are being covered with graffiti. Excreta is pushed through their letter boxes.

I know families who take their children to school every morning in a cab, not because the school is a long way off or because they can afford to take their children to school in a cab, but because they are frightened of the violence and harassment that they encounter when they are just walking in the street.

The issue does not affect only the black and Asian community in Hackney, which has traditionally been an area of Jewish settlement. The Jewish community, particularly the Hasidic community, is also suffering increasing harassment and violence. That growing problem exists not just in London but throughout the country.

The black community in Britain wants an end to this harassment and to the violence and killing. It wants action. Local councils must act, and far more quickly and effectively, against council tenants who harass other council tenants. Bexley council must act to close the British National party headquarters, which is in its borough. It is not coincidence that all the killings that I listed have taken place within three or four miles of that building.

I am sorry to say that the black community in south-east London feels, perhaps incorrectly, that Bexley is so insensitive to the fears of black ethnic minorities and Jewish people about the fascists' headquarters in the middle of the borough because it is Tory controlled. Bexley claims that it does not have the power to close down the headquarters, but I believe that even under the planning laws it can do so. How many more black school children have to be killed before Bexley makes a move to close that fascist headquarters?

This is a matter not for councils alone but for the Government, and I call on them to act. They need to look at the law. The law must be changed to make it easier to close fascist organisations and headquarters such as the BNP one in Bexley. The law needs to be strengthened on incitement to racial hatred. The Commission for Racial Equality has recently made welcome proposals to that end, and the Government should take them far more seriously than they have so far. Above all, the law needs to be changed to make racial harassment a legal offence.

The Government tell us that law and order is the number one political issue. Black people want law and order, too. If the Home Secretary can rush through a Bill to change the system of unit fines in this Session, I see no reason why he cannot rush through a Bill on racist violence and killing as well. Those fines may be upsetting people, but violence and killing are frightening the black community and are a far more appropriate subject for rushed legislation. I do not see any practical reason why the Government cannot bring forward such a Bill.

Above all, what the black community wants, what Stephen Lawrence's family wants, is for his killers to be brought to justice. A number of witnesses have said that they saw a gang of six white youths stab Stephen Lawrence to death, but so far only one person has been charged. The black community wants all six killers to be brought to justice. Nobody should be roaming the streets boasting of how he was able to stab to death a black youngster at a bus stop.

I have tried to outline the problems arising from racial harassment and violence. I have tried to convey the fear in which some people are living. However, the most notable and remarkable factor is that, in spite of the dire predictions of Enoch Powell over a quarter of a century ago, black and white people live happily together side by side. The extent to which, in 1993, we are a genuinely multiracial, multicultural society is remarkable. Black and white people do not live side by side in the same way in

cities such as Washington and New York in the United States. The extent to which black and white people live side by side is a tribute to the decency and kindliness of ordinary British people, black and white.

But racial harassment and violence exist and the recession, the pressure on working-class people and the level of unemployment are causing enormous tensions and making life difficult for many people. The message must go out from the House this afternoon that for racist murderers and bullies there is no place to run and nowhere to hide.

The most disturbing and hurtful aspect of the killing of Stephen Lawrence for the black community was the way in which initially it was almost entirely ignored by the mainstream media and the Government. The weekend after he was killed, only one national newspaper carried the story.

The black community has lived in Britain for centuries, but there has been a big black presence since the last war. Black people came to this country not to rely on charity and good will but to work. Indeed, to a great extent the progress made by this country since the war—in terms of its institutions, health service and public services—has been aided by black people, as citizens and workers. They have done much to build up the nation and its institutions.

Black people are not willing to stand by and see racial violence reach epidemic proportions. They want to be assured that when there are killings and racist murders in the community, their feelings will be respected and that the killing of black school children will be taken as seriously as the killing of white school children.

It is easy for politicians on both sides and Ministers to pay lip service to the issue of racial tolerance. But all concerned want, first and foremost, respect to be paid to the black community and the Lawrence family in their grief, and they want action from the Government. We do not want in Britain the sort of situation that exists in France, Italy and Germany, where, week after week, we hear about racist murders and the hostels and homes of black people and refugees being set alight. We do not want the tide of racism and nazism which is engulfing some European countries to engulf Britain.

I call on the Government to take the issue seriously, to pay respect to the Lawrence family and, above all, to take the firm action that is necessary to show the racists in our midst that their brutality and violence will not be tolerated, that there is not one law for black people and another for white people and that the lives of all British citizens are equally precious in the eyes of the Government.

2.22 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) and to the Minister for enabling me to take part in the debate.

I have lived for many years in my constituency of Woolwich, in the borough of Greenwich. I live a few hundred yards from the spot where Rolan Adams was murdered and a few hundred yards from where Orville Blair met his death. Prior to living at my present address, I lived in Woolwich only a few hundred yards from the spot where Stephen Lawrence's family live. So I know the area well, and it gives me no pleasure to come to the House today to speak in this debate.

My hon. Friend painted a clear picture of the daily experience of many black families in our community. After the Rolan Adams murder, a television company came to the area in which I live to make a programme. They interviewed some young black people and those black youths explained on television what life was like living there.

Colleagues of mine in the community and on the council complained about the distorted picture of their community that was being painted by the television company. They said, "This is not the area in which we live. That is not the community we recognise," and I had to admit that it was not the community that I recognised, either. I had to point out to some of my colleagues that if one were black, one's perception of the community and one's daily life experiences might be somewhat different.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington made a number of points that need to be considered. The main issues are incitement and harassment. There is no doubt that the presence of the British National party just over the border in Welling contributes in no small measure to the increase in racial violence in the area, and I believe that it is not only the responsibility of Bexley council, where the headquarters are, but a matter of serious concern to all of us and on which the Government need to act.

In 1992, the Commission for Racial Equality published its review of the Race Relations Act 1976. It recommended to the Government that an independent review of the working of the law on incitement to racial hatred should be conducted and that the Attorney-General's involvement should end. I will not go into the detail of the recommendations, but I understand that the Commmission for Racial Equality is still awaiting a response from the Home Secretary. It seems that the process by which a prosecution can be brought is extremely cumbersome, and perhaps that is why so few prosecutions have been brought.

The Commission for Racial Equality urged the Home Secretary to make racial harassment a specific criminal offence, to make racial harassment a ground for eviction, to place public authorities under a statutory duty to monitor complaints of racial harassment, to establish a separate tort of racial harassment and specifically to consider criminalising racial violence.

The Minister will know from when I visited him earlier this year with representatives of the anti-racist alliance and the Society of Black Lawyers that some draft legislation had been submitted to the Home Secretary for his consideration. I hope that serious consideration will be given to that matter.

My hon. Friend referred to the speed with which amendments to laws can be made. I understand that it is the Home Secretary's intention to introduce a Bill to amend the Criminal Justice Act 1991. I hope that at that time the Government will be prepared to consider the inclusion of specific offences of racial harassment, and I hope that we can have a debate on that.

The time to act is now. I do not want to come to the House again and have to speak in a debate following the murder of another Rolan Adams, Rohit Duggal or Stephen Lawrence. I hope that the Government will take seriously the recommendations that have been made.

2.27 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on her heartfelt speech and on securing her Adjournment debate on a day when the previous business finished early, allowing her more time than usual to deploy her case. The extra time allowed the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) to intervene and I listened carefully to what he said, as I know that many such incidents as we are debating have occurred in his constituency.

The hon. Member for Woolwich intervened to extend and to reinforce the points that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington had made. The fact that they are both here at this time on a Friday emphasises the concern that they feel about racial attacks and the harm that such assaults do to innocent people and the corroding fear that they generate among ethnic minority communities across the country.

The hon. Lady mentioned the murder of Stephen Lawrence in Greenwich on 22 April. It was an appalling crime and the more shocking because Stephen, as the hon. Lady explained, was studying for his A-levels and was clearly an able, peaceable, decent young man. He was planning to be an architect and obviously would have had much to contribute to society, both black and white, when he qualified.

I met his family—father, mother, brother and sister—when I visited Greenwich earlier in the week. No words that I can say can bring effective comfort to the shattering loss that they have suffered and which will be with them throughout the rest of the lives, but I am sure that the House will want to record the sympathy that the hon. Lady eloquently expressed and which I repeat on behalf of myself and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

I also visited the police when I was in Greenwich and was convinced that they are totally committed to bringing those involved in Stephen's death to justice—and they have now charged a 17-year-old with Stephen's murder. The police are acutely aware, as is the community—both black and white—that there have been three other murders of members of the black community in the area in the recent past.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Mr. Lloyd: Two of those three murders were clearly racial, as was that of Stephen, but in all three the murderer was caught and sentenced to life imprisonment—an indication of police determination to act effectively. But murder is not, thank God, the usual outcome of racially motivated crime. The police to whom I spoke in Greenwich understand that assaults and harassment are the day-to-day experience of racial crime and that they cause hurt and distress across the community—poisoning lives and relationships. that is why the police in the area have established a special racial attacks division in Plumstead, to encourage people to report racial attacks and to ensure that those reports are effectively followed up. Last year, the unit had a clear-up rate of 43 per cent., which is considerably higher than that for crime generally across London.

Across the country, as the hon. Lady said, there are attacks of varying nature and of varying seriousness and cumulatively they have an enormous impact. Last year, the number of recorded racial attacks continued to increase, with nearly 8,000 being reported. At least some of that increase stems from the police being required to collect statistics much more systematically in recent years, as a measure of the concern that they and the Government feel. In fact, in 1991 the definition of racial incident was broadened to include any incident where the victim had reason to believe that the incident was racial—if it could not be proved to be so.

Police efforts in many parts of the country to create confidence and to encourage victims to report incidents have also contributed to the increase in the numbers recorded—although I accept that, as for all crime, only a proportion of racial offending is reported. The police inspectorate has a special duty imposed on it in every inquiry into the arrangements that each force has to follow up reports of racial attacks.

On the many visits that I have made over the past year to ethnic minority meetings, cultural and other activities throughout the country, I have been impressed to find how often there are good personal relationships between the police and the organisers. I do not believe that such relationships could suddenly be constructed for my visit. They represent months and years of patient work on both sides. I am sure that that is happening increasingly—and where it does I suspect that, ironically, it helps to increase, in the short run, the number of racial incidents that are reported.

I am aware that there are many areas where relationships have a long way to go. If they are to be effective, they must include a number of agencies adopting a common approach. On my visit to Greenwich, I was glad to meet representatives of the council and some local community groups under the chairmanship of Mr. Dhillan, chairman of the Greenwich Council for Racial Equality. They emphasised their determination to work together in co-operation with the police to improve race relations generally and to combat racial attacks and harassment in particular.

Ms Abbott: The Minister said—I do not argue with this—that part of the reason for the rise in reported racial attacks is that people are more willing to come forward to report them because of better relationships between the police and community leaders. Does the Minister accept that, at a time of recession and severe unemployment, as well as there being an increased willingness by people to report them, racial attacks are on the rise? It is inevitable that if there are gangs of youths with nothing to do, there will be violence and harassment. Does he accept that although there may be greater willingness by people to report the attacks, there is also an increasing trend of racial attacks?

Mr. Lloyd: I am not sure that I gathered the last line of the hon. Lady's intervention. Did she say, "increasing trend"?

Ms Abbott: I said that racial attacks themselves were on the rise.

Mr. Lloyd: It is difficult to tell from the figures whether racial attacks have gone up because there is an increasing number, or because there is an increasing readiness to

report them. I said that I was sure that part of the increase had occurred because of the greater determination of the police to record racial attacks and because of a wider definition of racial attacks. However, I do not exclude the possibility that there has been a general increase. It would be impossible for me to do so because I do not know. What I do know is that there are far too many attacks; one attack is one too many. A great deal of harassment and hurt, which is less serious individually, but which is cumulatively important, does not get reported. I accept that point.

I also accept that the total conditions in an area—the social relationships—contribute to particular problems. I do not single out any particular item as being the key or as being specifically responsible, not least because many of the identified perpetrators of attacks are not unemployed. Unemployment does not help, but I should not put it down as one of the causes although I can see that it might be a contributory factor in individual cases. Areas of multiple social deprivation are the areas that are most likely to breed the tensions that lead to attacks. The parts of Greenwich and the parts of London where there have been many attacks are in many ways attractive areas in which to be and in which to live.

The dynamics of the situation are complicated. It is impossible to pick out one cause and to say that if one eliminated that, the problem would go away. It is basically to do with relationships, with the way in which people regard themselves and with the way in which people regard those who belong to other communities or who are of other colours.

I return to the role of agencies, which is crucial in combating racial crime, including assaults and harassment. Since the Home Affairs Select Committee report of 1986 and the establishment of the interdepartmental racial attacks group, chaired by the Home Office, there has been an increasing emphasis on such an approach. The group's first report was published in 1989 and made a series of detailed recommendations for the police service, housing authorities and other organisations on combatting racial violence and harassment. Its key recommendation was that multi-agency groups should be established to deal with such crimes in the areas in which they occurred.

A follow-up report published last year surveyed progress so far, noted good practice and gave advice on the formation and strengthening of local agencies. The two reports have been important in promoting the multi-agency approach and in offering practical assistance on how agencies might co-operate effectively to address this difficult issue. In practice, this approach draws together a number of groups, including the police, the housing authorities, local education authorities and schools, the social services, local community groups and race equality councils, and sometimes others, such as the Crown Prosecution Service. These various groups pool information and work together to provide protection for those vulnerable to attacks and to help victims—for example, through joint visits. Incidents reported to one agency can be referred to other agencies in order to build up a complete picture of the racial harassment in the area. This can be particularly helpful where victims are unwilling to report attacks to the police. The joint approach also allows evidence gathered by the police to be used by other statutory agencies for their action.

The hon. Lady mentioned in particular the activities of the British National party, and in particular the fact that for some years it has had in Welling, not far from Greenwich, a headquarters and bookshop, although when I saw it the other day it was boarded up and clearly not a bookshop open to the general public. I know, however, that there is a very widespread and deeply held belief in Greenwich and the surrounding areas that its presence is responsible for many of the racial incidents in that part of London and must be implicated in the murders that have taken place.

The BNP holds repugnant views which are disliked and condemned by the vast majority of people in all parts of the community, and I can understand how particularly offensive their visible presence must be to those in the ethnic minorities. Last year, the police raided the premises and seized material with a view to bringing a prosecution on the grounds of incitement to racial hatred, but the CPS decided that the material provided insufficient evidence to secure a conviction.

In the absence of any change in the type of material being distributed, any further action by the police would certainly lead to claims by the BNP that it was being victimised—giving it the kind of publicity that it would find helpful in recruiting sympathisers.

It has also been suggested, and the hon. Lady mentioned it, that the British National party offices should be closed on the grounds of an abuse of planning permission. This is a matter for Bexley council, but I understand that legal advice from the council's solicitors is that such closure could be successfully contested by BNP in the courts. If that happened, it would produce publicity that was not to the disadvantage of the British National party.

The police also tell me that last year they found links to the BNP in only two of the many incidents that they investigated. I believe that there are no powers under the existing legislation to proscribe organisations other than terrorist organisations, such as the IRA—although not Sinn Fein, which sympathises with and supports it. The only legislation that enables Ministers to ban terrorist organisations is the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984. That Act enables the Home Secretary to proscribe any organisation that appears to him to be concerned with terrorism.

I am afraid, therefore, that today at this Dispatch Box I cannot give the hon. Lady any undertaking or any encouragement to believe that the BNP's official presence can be removed under our present law. If its official presence could be removed, its unofficial presence, and its supporters and sympathisers, would remain and would just as conveniently meet in private houses and store their propaganda there. Nor can I indicate to the hon. Lady that the law could be changed to make such closure possible without creating powers for authorities to close down a range of fringe political groups in different parts of the political spectrum. I do not believe that that would be acceptable to the House or to the country at large.

Ms Abbott *rose*——

Mr. Lloyd: Before I leave that point and allow the hon. Lady to intervene, let me stress, as I did earlier, that I appreciate the strength of feeling that there is on this subject, not merely among the ethnic minorities, but across the community generally. I am bearing that point very

[Mr. Lloyd]

much in mind as we complete our review of the Commission for Racial Equality recommendations on how the Race Relations Act 1976 can be updated.

I want to put on record for the hon. Lady, as she specifically raised the point, my doubts about whether the present law can be used in the way that she wants, and also my doubts about whether it would be right, helpful or acceptable to the House to devise a law to shut down this establishment which might lead to side-effects that neither she nor the rest of the House would wish. This is a difficult subject and it is not my final word upon it. Nevertheless, I place on record those important reservations so that she and the House know about them.

Ms Abbott: Does the Minister accept that for black and Jewish people, the BNP and other fascist organisations are terrorist organisations, both in name and in fact? Does he further accept that for local people, both black and white, Bexley council's reluctance to use the powers available to it is utterly shameful? How many more young black people have to die before the council acts? It would be preferable for the council to incur some inconvenience in the courts than for other young people to lose their lives because of the activities of fascists in south-east London.

Mr. Lloyd: I accept that the hon. Lady speaks sincerely and on behalf of many people, especially those in the ethnic minorities—although her views stretch across all the communities. However, I cannot accept that Bexley council believes that it has powers, but is unwilling to use them. I believe that the council sincerely believes that, in this case, it does not have the powers to enable it effectively to shut the offices. If the matter were taken to court and lost, the result would be helpful to the BNP, but no one else.

Nor can I accept that the role of the BNP, however unpleasant its views and however strident some of its comments, can be compared with a terrorist movement like the IRA. If it could, there would be no problem—it would be proscribed. It is different, even though its role and activities are deeply unpleasant and unattractive. That is why it cannot be proscribed under current law. We are a country of laws, not one in which Ministers, on the basis of their own feelings or on the strength of public opinion, can ban organisations or remove them from an area. Our laws are occasionally a frustration, but they are a protection for all of us, whatever the community to which we belong.

The hon. Member for Woolwich referred specifically to one of the CRE's recommendations for a separate crime of racial assault. To summarise the hon. Gentleman's remarks, he said that implementation of that recommendation would mark out society's particular condemnation of racially motivated violence and reassure the ethnic minority communities. Against that, it must be emphasised that a violent attack is a crime, whoever commits it and against whomever it is committed. It must be seen as such, because that is what it is.

I am not convinced that if the additional requirement of demonstrating that the motive were racial were added to the law, that would be beneficial. It would be that much harder to secure a conviction, because another item would have to be proved. Even if it could be, I am not convinced that, on balance, racial harmony would be helped if white victims of white violence could complain that the criminal would have been given a longer sentence had he, the victim, been black. Nor would it be helpful in cases where the attacker was black and the victim from another racial group, to have the inevitable press inquiry of why the attacker was not charged with a racially motivated crime. I am outlining the reservations to those proposals because I take the proposals seriously, as I do all those made by the CRE. That is why it is taking some time for the Home Secretary and I to make our response.

I know of the feeling in the ethnic minority communities and we should like to devise a law to give those communities the maximum protection, but some of the suggestions would not necessarily work as predicted or lead to greater harmony. There is a law under which it is possible to take into account all the relevant circumstances of a crime, which includes the motivation of the attacker if he was racially motivated. That may be reflected in the sentence—indeed, in sentencing, the courts should take all relevant circumstances into account. I am not sure whether it would be helpful to go beyond that.

The hon. Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington and for Woolwich stressed the point, so I am acutely aware of the fact that the day-to-day reality of racial harassment lies in the repeated threats, minor assaults and persecution suffered by members of minority communities. The Metropolitan police records suggest that only a small proportion of incidents reported to them involve serious assault. That is one of the reasons why section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 created a new low-level offence of offensive conduct, which extended criminal liability to behaviour that had hitherto not been criminal.

The White Paper on the review of public order law specifically identified members of the ethnic minority communities as those who should be protected from such behaviour. Section 5 does not require a complaint from a victim and is especially useful when a victim is not willing to come to the police or when a particular victim is difficult to identify. The law has been extended so that it covers the type of assaults, harassment and persecution to which ethnic minority communities are peculiarly subject. The police are very alive to their use of it, but, as this country is a country of laws, there must be sufficient evidence to prosecute if someone is to be punished by the courts for breaking the rules.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington for raising this issue. It is grave because it deeply affects the lives of many people in the ethnic minorities and, as in the recent case of Stephen Lawrence, can encompass the death of an innocent human being. The Government are considering where the effectiveness of the law could be improved. I believe that its reach is fairly comprehensive and the major difficulty in securing convictions is gathering the evidence. The police are placing an increasingly high priority on that under the supervision of the inspectorate, but they rely on the co-operation of all parts of the community. I am impressed and encouraged by the co-operation that they now receive, but much more remains to be done.

On that note, I am sure that the fact that the hon. Lady has brought this issue before the House so starkly today will give a further stimulus to that co-operation so that the scourge of racial assaults and attacks may diminish and eventually be eliminated. For that to happen, we need not only effective policing and a comprehensive law but good

relations between the communities, which are hard to create where they do not already exist. However, as the hon. Lady said, enormous progress has been made in this country. Many predictions were made years ago, but I am happy that we are now discussing the issue without their having come true. However, I echo what the hon. Lady said: for several families in south-east London, most notably that of Stephen Lawrence in the past few weeks, such predictions have regrettably come all too true.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 24 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Lane Rental

1. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the amount of time saved by motorists since lane rental was introduced.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): Lane rental contracts have, on average, been completed 30 per cent. faster than conventional contracts since their introduction in 1984, and we estimate that that has saved more than £120 million in delay and other costs.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend and I are probably more at one on lane rental than we will be on line rental later today. Coming as I do from cone county in Kent, I ask my hon. Friend to reassure the House that when he decides on major works on the A20/M20 and A2/M2—which are parallel roads—he will make certain that the works are staggered and that interconnecting roads between those two major highways are not subject to road works at the same time.

Mr. Carlisle: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am sorry if there is any congestion in Kent, but it is partly caused by our determination to get those roads finished in time for the opening of the channel tunnel. Lane rental has a considerable amount to offer. A maintenance contract that used to last one month will be reduced by 10 days by lane rental, which makes a huge contribution to cutting congestion and reducing frustration among local people.

London Commuter Services

2. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the level of services to the commuters of London and the south-east; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): In the four years to the autumn of 1993, British Rail record a drop of 20 per cent. in London commuter passengers. British Rail has therefore been obliged to reduce services. Reductions in the new timetable amount to about 3 per cent. overall, which is half the recent rate of fall in demand. As demand recovers, services will be increased.

Mrs. Prentice: How can the Minister justify the 8 per cent. fare increase in January on Network SouthEast—the highest in the country—when last week peak-hour trains through Lewisham and north Kent were cut by 42 and the Sunday service was halved? Will he tell the House how that will enhance passenger comfort and persuade more people to travel by train?

Mr. Freeman: Fewer passengers are using Network SouthEast compared to four years ago. The recession has caused a reduction in London commuting. As we recover from the recession, demand will increase and additional services will be provided. British Rail, like any other great industrial enterprise, must tailor its services to demand. As to fare increases, I hope that the hon. Lady will welcome the fact that British Rail has for two years been differentiating between lines. Where there is a better service, there are more than average fare increases, but where it is acknowledged that the service is relatively poor, fare increases are relatively low.

Mr. Sims: Many people living in outer-London constituencies rely on train services for social and leisure activities, as well as for getting to and from work. Although one accepts that the frequency of services must be matched to demand, does not my hon. Friend think that it is extraordinary that British Rail is reducing Sunday services to one train an hour? Is that not itself likely to lead to a greater fall in demand?

Mr. Freeman: As I said, British Rail must react to the fall in demand by cutting services, because that is the nature of a cash-limited nationalised industry. I hope that, with the gradual introduction of franchised passenger services, operators will take more commercial risks. I agree with my hon. Friend that one can easily fall into a downward spiral of service as services are cut and demand falls. I hope that we will be in a virtuous upward spiral with private sector operation.

Mr. Harvey: How soon do the Government envisage privatising commuter services in the south-east? We heard originally that most of the privatisation would take place during the lifetime of this Parliament; later, that it might take 15 years; and, on another occasion, that the floodgates were being held back until next year. Now we hear that another 18 areas are to be identified today. Has the Department of Transport listened to the Prime Minister's advice, that lessons should be learnt from the local election results? If so, what lessons has the Department learnt about the speed of this legislation?

Mr. Freeman: Our policy has not changed. We said in our election manifesto that the intention was to have a significant number of franchises in place at the end of this Parliament. I can confirm that the intention is to let the first franchise in the second half of next year. Thereafter, we shall proceed gradually. It is an evolutionary process; it is not a process that involves a great number of franchises being let at the same time. We shall learn by the process. It will take a number of years, and certainly beyond this Parliament. But our policy has not changed. All that has happened today is that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has spelt out what the long-term plan is for franchising all of Great Britain's rail services.

Mr. Ottaway: I remind my hon. Friend that not all commuters travel by rail; many of my constituents travel into London by road. I remind him also of the complete lack of good main roads between Croydon and the centre of London and that this is the only sector where there is no good main road into or out of London.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me and the House of the need to improve road services in London. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London has already laid out the Government's policy on red routes. Both my hon. Friend and I have emphasised the importance of traffic priority measures to help public transport, such as buses, move more easily in the capital. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London will have heard what my hon. Friend has had to say.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Minister aware that the recommendation to Network SouthEast is standing room for 16 in a carriage and that at present the number is about 160? By cutting services, the Minister would at least reduce the amount of time that people spend standing on our trains. When he talks about services, he has to take into account that people are travelling in congested, dangerous conditions on Network SouthEast trains.

Mr. Freeman: I would not agree with the hon. Gentleman that Network SouthEast runs an unsafe service. British Rail rightly places great reliance on safety. This year alone, British Rail will spend about £250 million on improving the safety of rail operations. When public sector franchisees run services, safety standards will be as high, if not higher.

Traffic Flow Management

3. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what efforts are being made to introduce new technology into the management of traffic flows; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): My Department already makes use of new technology for three purposes: assisting traffic management, enhancing road safety and providing information for road users. Closed circuit television and variable message signs are now well established on the busiest motorways, such as the M25. Cameras are also being used on trunk roads in London to detect drivers speeding and violating red light signals.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I certainly welcome the use of new technology to improve traffic flows and reduce accidents. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the red light signal cameras that have been installed have helped to reduce accidents considerably in Greater London, particularly serious accidents, and that the Government will continue to use technology to improve traffic flow and reduce the number of serious accidents on our roads? Furthermore, can my right hon. Friend confirm that the numbers of road deaths and serious road injuries in this country are among the lowest in the whole of Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is entirely right on the last point, but we want to do better. I agree that speed cameras and cameras at traffic signals can contribute considerably towards improving road safety. Since they were introduced, speed detection cameras have reduced fatal and serious casualties on roads by 50 per cent. Cameras at red light signals have reduced accidents by 60 per cent. The cameras also assist with traffic flow, the point of my hon. Friend's question, because if accidents are reduced, traffic flow is improved.

Mr. Barry Jones: Does the Secretary of State accept that some traffic jams will not be solved by technology, however interesting the case may be? I refer him to a problem on the England-Wales border, where a new River Dee crossing is required, which will cost many millions of pounds. Can he assure me that that scheme will go ahead and will not be subject to the public expenditure review? Does he know that the communities of Queensferry, Shotton, Connah's Quay and Kelsterton are suffering a tremendous environmental blight? They need the scheme urgently. Can the Secretary of State give us a promise about that scheme?

Mr. MacGregor: That point is a long way from new technology to assist traffic flow. I cannot comment on that scheme, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to table a specific question I shall do so. I note his support for our record road building programme to improve traffic flow generally. I hope that he will continue to support all that we are doing in that regard, including lobbying some of his colleagues who sometimes object to it, because there is no doubt that our record road building programme is greatly assisting our economic competitiveness by reducing congestion.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend have any plans to install cameras on the M25 to detect speeding? If there are plans to put cameras on that and other motorways, will there be advance warning signs so that drivers are more aware that they may be exceeding the speed limit?

Mr. MacGregor: The knowledge that such cameras are around in itself discourages speeding, but I take note of what my hon. Friend says about warning signs. At the moment, the main technology on the M25 is designed to improve information for drivers. We are also experimenting with quite an expensive new scheme which will be introduced in due course to try to stop bunching and starting and stopping. I have no doubt that we shall also install cameras to assist in other ways.

Oxleas Wood

4. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to the advantages of saving Oxleas wood from destruction by means of a deep bore tunnel under the wood to connect with the east London river crossing.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): When making their decision to proceed with the scheme, the Secretaries so State for Transport and for the Environment took full account of all the evidence presented at the public inquiry. That included the independent inspector's conclusion that a bored tunnel under Oxleas wood could not be justified.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister recognise that the Government scheme, which would involve the destruction of this unique and precious piece of ancient woodland, has

been universally condemned, and that even the British Road Federation is now calling for an alternative route to save Oxleas wood? When will the Government come to their senses and call a halt to this act of environmental vandalism?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman tempts me to remind the House that such hyperbole is so wildly wide of the mark that it makes no rational contribution to the debate. The reality is that 89 per cent. of Oxleas wood will be unaffected by the scheme. Perhaps the House should be more aware of that—11 per cent. of the wood will be taken, but 89 per cent. will not. Perhaps that puts the issue into proper perspecitive.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will my hon. Friend remind the House that the inspectors recommended that the road should be covered if it went through Oxleas wood but that, since the inspectors' reports, the British Road Federation has said that if the bridge which would help Newham and perhaps Thamesmead were built, the road through Oxleas wood would not be needed and that, in line with the Government's east Thames corridor proposals, the road should go towards the M25 and Dartford—*[Interruption.]*—rather than coming down into Shrewsbury ward in the constituency of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) and into my constituency?

Mr. Norris: I have seen the BRF's scheme. My hon. Friend will have noted from the reaction that his mention of it has caused that it solves some problems but creates others. It is an interesting proposition which I shall, of course, ensure is fully explored, but we should not underestimate the fact that after the longest public inquiry on record—lasting 15 months—the inspectors concluded that the bored tunnel could not be justified and that, in the interests of what the scheme delivers, the environmental disadvantage was capable of being set against the greater strategic advantages of the new road.

Ms Walley: Why will not the Minister and the Secretary of State listen to what the people are saying about the £1 billion road programme and the way in which it appears to be immune from proper environmental impact assessment? Will he tell the House why he is not prepared to give us the right to know about the scheme, why is he not prepared immediately to make public the European Commission's full reasoned opinion on Oxleas wood and what action he is prepared to take to safeguard this site of special scientific interest from the bulldozer?

Mr. Norris: If the hon. Lady knew a little more about the matter, she would appreciate that the EC's reasoned opinion has nothing to do with the merits of the scheme. I am astonished that she is not aware that the EC's reasoned opinion is based on the merits of the transitional provisions of the appropritate directive. It is, incidentally, on a basis with which the Government have consistently disagreed. I see no reason, therefore, why what the EC has said should have had any impact on the route.

On publication, the hon. Lady will know that such communications between the Commission and the Governments of member states are always treated as confidential by both parties—*[Interruption.]* I stress that they are treated as confidential by both parties—not just by the Government, but by the Commission.

Heathrow Express

5. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects construction of the Heathrow express to commence.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that it is the intention of the joint venture partners—BAA and British Rail—to begin construction towards the end of this year.

Mr. Haselhurst: Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that the period of dilatoriness up to getting agreement for the project is now finally over and that he will use his best endeavours to ensure that construction proceeds speedily? The project now has enhanced importance in view of the welcome decision to proceed with crossrail.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. I was pleased to play some part in bringing the discussions to a conclusion, quite speedily towards the end. I also agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of getting on with the project. It is necessary for the technical details of the joint venture to be finalised between the parties and for some further detailed design work to be undertaken before construction proper can commence. We hope that that will be towards the end of this year and, if there are no unforeseen difficulties, the railway could be open to passengers by late 1997. I am sure that the whole House welcomes the successful conclusion of the discussions and the joint venture and I hope that it leads to many more.

Dr. Godman: The Minister will know that the issue is of considerable importance to all those who travel from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen to London Heathrow and who then have that disgraceful journey from Heathrow to the centre of London. Between now and 1997, will the Minister's officials speak to officials of London Transport to speed up the service between the centre of London and Heathrow? Some trains could, for example, stop at Hammersmith and then continue uninterruptedly to Heathrow terminal 4.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall put that point to London Transport. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that the joint venture is now going ahead. Given that the question was asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), the hon. Gentleman might also point out to some of his constituents and others from Scotland who come to London that there is also a good service from Stansted airport direct to London.

Mr. Dicks: Bearing in mind that the Heathrow express has a major impact on my constituents, will my right hon. Friend ensure that, with the coming of crossrail, people are not allowed to pop into Heathrow on their journeys, west or east, just to fill up the gaps left by the Heathrow express?

Mr. MacGregor: I note my hon. Friend's point. I do not think that people are likely to do that.

Jubilee Line Extension

6. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when a start will be made on construction of the Jubilee line extension.

Mr. Norris: Negotiations are continuing on the precise terms of the funding agreement between London Underground and the parties concerned with the financing of Canary wharf. I am hopeful that they will soon be successfully concluded.

Mr. Austin-Walker: Whether it is the dead hand of the Treasury or the dithering of the Prime Minister, does the Minister agree that the time to invest in our infrastructure is before we come out of recession? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that 85 per cent. of the contracts for the building of the Jubilee line are ready to go, with the prospect of between 10,000 and 30,000 jobs being created? Will he further press the Cabinet for extension of the Jubilee line to Woolwich? Will he confirm that a rail crossing of the River Thames at Woolwich could be built at a quarter of the cost of building the east London river crossing?

Mr. Norris: On the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we have, of course, made it plain that we are prepared to commence construction of the line as soon as the private sector contribution is in place. On the hon. Gentleman's point about the Woolwich crossing, he will be aware that that was extensively investigated by London Transport and the conclusion was that it should not proceed at this stage.

As for the hon. Gentleman's point about the river crossing, he will be aware that the road crossing—the east London river crossing—is of major strategic importance to London, particularly the east of London, and that it will, in due course, play a very important role in enhancing infrastructure in east London.

Mr. Channon: I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that this is a matter of very great urgency, not only for the obvious reasons that have been outlined on many occasions in the House, but because it is impossible to proceed with phase 2 of the parliamentary building programme—as the overwhelming majority of hon. Members want to do—until we know one way or the other when the Jubilee line extension is likely to take place. Will my hon. Friend bear that in mind, as it is very important and urgent?

Mr. Norris: I, too, understand what my right hon. Friend has said. Any delay to the start of the project is regrettable. However, my right hon. Friend will appreciate that the position that the Government have adopted has remained as it was originally. When the private sector is able to put its contribution in place, construction of the scheme can begin. It clearly cannot begin before that date.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister accept that the position on the Jubilee line is absolutely unacceptable? It is 14 months since the Bill received Royal Assent; we have had promises that construction of the line was about to be announced and completed; the money has been standing by for a year; we have had rumours one week that documentation for the scheme was about to be signed and the next week that it was not; two weeks ago, the managing director of London Underground told the Transport Select Committee that the documents between London Underground and the private sector had now been agreed; and every day that passes businesses are blighted and go under. People want an underground line and they want the Government to put their hands on and not take them off. The people concerned should bang their heads together and get the line agreed. Is that going to happen or not? For heaven's sake, tell us the truth.

Mr. Norris: I deeply resent that last suggestion. It is quite obvious that all the way through our message has been very straightforward. The Government are prepared to contribute around £1·5 billion to the project on the basis that the private sector comes forward with its own contribution of £400 million in cash. I regret the delay as much as the hon. Gentleman. He and I have debated the issue many times. We are making progress and that progress will continue. When the process is complete—and it is impossible for me or the managing director of London Underground or anyone else to set a date at this stage—we will begin construction of the line.

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Jubilee line extension project will make a massive contribution to employment prospects in the centre of London. Will he confirm that he will do all he can to ensure that the project starts at the earliest opportunity? Will he also confirm that the east London crossing will remain in east London and not be shipped off to Dartford, as was suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley)?

Mr. Norris: On the first point, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear in his autumn statement that the Government are committed to their contribution towards building the Jubilee line. That substantial contribution is well in excess of £1·5 billion. As to my hon. Friend's point about the route of the east London river crossing, he will appreciate that its whole strategic importance is predicated on the assumption that it links the A406 with the A2 where it currently does.

Mr. Tony Banks: Surely the Minister recalls that his Department has issued more press statements on the Jubilee line extension going ahead than I have had hot dinners—and I have had one or two of those? Once again, it looks as though the Government have changed the rules. We now learn that the contracts and understandings that have been negotiated with the private sector have been changed in terms of Government requirements. Have there been any changes in Government requirements since last November with regard to deals with the private sector?

Will the Minister make it quite clear that he is not being pressurised by the Treasury into scrapping the Jubilee line extension altogether? That is what the newspapers and various people in the private sector are saying. Is not the Minister fully aware that unless the Jubilee line extension goes ahead, a large number of question marks will hang over the development in docklands, the City airport, Canary wharf and the whole of the east Thames corridor initiative?

Mr. Norris: I shall not swap tallies of hot dinners with the hon. Gentleman because I recognise that I might lose. I am delighted to confirm that there has been no change whatever in the Government's position. Nor is there any ground between the Department of Transport and any other Department of Government. The Government's position has been clear throughout and I will restate it for the avoidance of doubt. It is that the Government remain committed to putting money into the project once the private sector contribution is concluded and assured. I readily accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the

impact of the Jubilee line extension, particularly on those areas south of the Thames which stand to benefit substantially when the extension is built. I hope that a satisfactory conclusion can be arrived at so that the line can go ahead. But it must depend on the private sector contribution.

Sir Michael Neubert: If that is so, could I confirm from the Government Benches the intense frustration of Londoners that, six months after the announcement of the Government's commitment to the project, one of the principal purposes of the project, the creation of jobs and a recovery in the capital, is being frustrated by continued prevarication by the bankers? Is there nothing more that my hon. Friend can do to persuade them to get their act together?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend mentioned the responsibilities of some of the creditors of Olympia and York. The complexity of arriving at an agreement with the creditors of Olympia and York, which I understand was the largest property company in the world when it went into administration, was underestimated. That has necessarily meant that the process of arriving at a new arrangement has been extremely complex and hazardous. I should like to put it on the record that the Government believe that all the parties to negotiations have acted throughout in good faith. Important and difficult negotiations have taken place. I regret the delay in the creation of jobs and opportunities, but I am convinced, as I know is my hon. Friend, that it is right to press the developers, who will gain materially from the development in return for their contribution.

Concessionary Fares

7. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the continuation of concessionary fare schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have received several representations about the continuation of concessionary fare schemes. Such schemes are a matter for the local authorities concerned, not for the Government.

Mr. Spellar: Does the Minister recognise that that was an unsatisfactory response? Concessionary fare schemes and bus passes are a vital lifeline for many pensioners: for many they are the difference between existing and living. Why will not the Minister make a straightforward statement that the Government are committed to the continuation of these enormously important schemes and that they will do everything in their power to ensure that the schemes remain? Why will not the Minister give pensioners some assurance and give them a straightforward answer? Yes or no—will he protect the schemes?

Mr. Freeman: Concessionary fare schemes specifically for buses, but also for other forms of local public transport, are the responsibility of local government, not central Government. Local authorities, including passenger transport authorities, have the responsibility for ranking their schemes in priority. It is a matter for local government.

Mr. Forman: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, during the fairly long period in which concessionary fare schemes have operated, especially in the Greater London area, most local authorities have acted responsibly and have seen fit to maintain the schemes?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He will know that local authorities in Greater London currently provide about £120 million a year for concessionary fare schemes. Local authorities in London are to be congratulated on continuing to support such schemes. It must be for other local authorities to fix their own priorities and continue such schemes as they see fit.

Mr. Snape: Instead of hiding behind the local authority smokescreen, why does not the Minister acknowledge that it was the irrational and arbitary decision of the late Lord Ridley to prevent local authorities from acting as precepting authorities which has brought about the present financial problems and the direct threat to concessionary fares? For once, cannot Ministers tell the truth and admit their responsibilities?

Mr. Freeman: The advantage of the levying system in comparison with the old precepting system is that passenger-transport authorities have to reach agreement with local district councils about the political priorities. That seems to be essentially democratic and I believe that the system should continue.

Mr. Dickens: Would not it be extraordinary if those who win the franchises for the various railway networks did not continue the concessionary railcard scheme? Is not it a way of attracting more passengers? Indeed, the new franchisees may even come up with better ideas. Am I right in saying that the Railways Bill makes the provision of railcards for disabled people an obligation?

Mr. Freeman: Railcards are different from local authority concessionary fare schemes. I agree with my hon. Friend that British Rail introduced the cards not as a result of pressure from Government or individual Ministers, or parliamentary legislation, but for good commercial reasons. There is no reason to believe that franchisees will not wish to continue to provide the same service.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Minister aware that his own Government, in the London Regional Transport (Amendment) Act 1985, took statutory powers to force local authorities to impose a concessionary scheme for London pensioners? Why does he draw a distinction between the two schemes?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will know that local authorities have always arrived at voluntary agreements. The Act contains a reserve power, but authorities have reached voluntary agreements every year since they have had responsibility for these matters and I believe that they will continue to do so.

Bus Deregulation

8. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the benefits to bus users outside London of deregulation.

12. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change has taken place in bus mileage outside London since deregulation.

Mr. Freeman: The deregulation of bus services outside London has resulted in a 20 per cent. increase in bus mileage, with many new services to areas not previously served by buses. Operator costs have been reduced by more than a third.

Mr. Congdon: Given the real success of deregulation in providing more buses, will my hon. Friend confirm that Londoners can expect to receive similar benefits when it is introduced here? When will we have an opportunity to experience those benefits?

Mr. Freeman: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Deregulation will permit new operators to provide additional services at different times of the week and in different parts of Greater London. That is the experience of deregulation outside London.

Ms Walley: It is not.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Lady has her eyes closed. In many parts of the country, new buses are providing new services for passengers.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my hon. Friend note that in Surrey, as in other areas, some of the services that are now provided are much more responsive to the needs of local people? That is extremely welcome and if deregulation enables it to continue in London, it will be welcomed by Londoners as well. There is no doubt, however, that it is essential for the Government to ensure that the rules and regulations enable bus services to continue: they are much in demand.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend will know that the Government intend to introduce a Bill in due course and to set up a central agency in London to continue to subsidise socially necessary services. Outside London, the position is different: subsidies are provided by local authorities.

Mr. Redmond: The Minister is talking a load of rubbish. He knows that deregulation does not work. It has meant higher fares, clapped-out buses and, in most cases, no buses at all in both rural and urban areas. Will the Minister accept that deregulation has not worked? Will he go up to South Yorkshire and ask old-age pensioners about it?

Mr. Freeman: We have issued a consultation document to all local authorities—and, I hope, to all local bus companies—asking them to comment on how the 1985 arrangements are working. If improvements are necessary to ensure that services are provided flexibly by the private sector, we shall consider introducing legislation.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that the Minister knows—as does everyone else with an interest in these matters—of the 30 per cent. reduction in the number of passengers in urban areas outside London and the 30 per cent. increase in fares. If the Tories regard that as a success story, they are welcome to it.

I am sure that the Minister's colleagues are anxious for parallels to be made with rail privatisation today. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us how many private operators run schemes offering discounted through-ticketing for journeys covering more than one operator's area?

Mr. Freeman: Almost without exception, in areas outside London, local authorities have sponsored and the private sector now participates in, multi-modal travelcards. That is true of Manchester, where representatives of the Manchester Metro are discussing with local authorities the introduction of a local travelcard. The hon. Gentleman was right about the reduction in patronage, but that has been happening since the second world war. There has been a gradual decline in the use of buses because people prefer the flexibility of using a car. We must face the challenge to halt and reverse that trend—Conservative policies will meet that challenge.

Roads (Pre-construction Procedures)

10. **Sir Thomas Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to speed up the pre-construction procedures for roads.

Mr. MacGregor: I am committed to the faster delivery of road schemes and shall soon introduce a package of proposals to speed up statutory and administrative procedures for preparing road schemes.

Sir Thomas Arnold: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is an urgent need to speed up those procedures? Does he envisage reaching a stage where either amending or primary legislation will be necessary? Will he do everything possible to speed up the construction of his Department's proposed Stockport north-south bypass?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic has been answering parliamentary questions on my hon. Friend's latter point, which I have noted. I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of speeding up the procedure. On average there is an interval of about thirteen and a half years between a scheme's entering a programme and finally being opened and 12 of those thirteen and a half years are spent discussing the route and giving all interested parties the right to argue their case. I do not wish to affect the rights of interested parties to do so, but I wonder whether the process needs to take an average of 12 years. Some proposals that I introduce may require primary legislation, but I am anxious to do as much as possible without such legislation.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Bail Abscondees

30. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the role of his Department in respect of securing the return of persons on bail who have absconded overseas.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Provided that the absconder is in a country with which the United Kingdom has an extradition treaty, the prosecution authority prepares an application for extradition, where appropriate, which is then conveyed to the relevant Government.

Mr. Denham: Is the Minister aware of the widespread embarrassment and incredulity felt at the sight of the Lord Chancellor creeping across the border into north Cyprus to beg for the return to British justice of Asil Nadir, a major financier of the Tory party? Does the Minister feel that it might be more appropriate for the Government's Law Officers to spend their time investigating matters and acting within their remit—for example, investigating the

possibility of illegal donations to the Tory party and ensuring that a watch is kept on small Dorset airfields so that other dubious financiers thinking of jumping ship at a difficult time for the country are unable to flee British justice?

The Attorney-General: The principal absconder in this case seems to be the hon. Gentleman, who has absconded a long way from the question.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, in the case of Asil Nadir, the Serious Fraud Office frequently objected to bail, but the judges decided to grant it against those objections? Will he also confirm that no donations were made to the Conservative party by the late Robert Maxwell?

The Attorney-General: On the portion of the question relevant to me, I can confirm that the Serious Fraud Office initially opposed bail. Thereafter, questions of bail were a matter for the court.

Mr. Fraser: Members of both Front Benches must want Asil Nadir back to stand his trial. Was it on the right hon. and learned Gentleman's advice as Attorney-General or on the advice of the famous advisers in the Foreign Office that the Lord Chancellor—the head of the judicial service—went as a sort of Mediterranean bounty hunter to Rauf Denktash to try to secure the return of Asil Nadir, which seems a bizarre mission for a judge? Is not the right course of action to make it clear to the administration in northern Cyprus that it does nothing to help its authority or credibility if it allows northern Cyprus to be a refuge for bail bandits?

The Attorney-General: I am afraid that I cannot accept most of the premises on which the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question was based. But I certainly agree that it is the desire of hon. Members on both sides of the House that those who are accused and are to stand trial in the United Kingdom should appear at their trial so that justice may be done.

Mr. Stephen: Is it right that the United Kindom refused to extradite a wanted person to northern Cyprus on the ground that there is no extradition treaty between the two countries? Is not the right way to proceed to enter into an extradition treaty with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus so that the whole matter may be put on a proper legal basis?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend forgets that we do not recognise the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Mr. Alan Clark's Memoirs

31. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General what consideration he has given to the contents of Mr. Alan Clark's memoirs in connection with the disclosure of information covered by the Official Secrets Act 1989.

The Attorney-General: None. Former Ministers are required to submit their memoirs to the Secretary of the Cabinet before publication. Matters of national security are considered in accordance with the principles set out in the Radcliffe report of 1976, Command 6386.

Mr. Dalyell: On the content of Alan Clark's contribution, may I ask a question of which I have given notice? Are Law Officers and Foreign Office legal advisers sure that our country has not contravened the 1989 convention on the rights of the child—which relates to what happens to children as a result of armed conflict—in the light of the fact that thousands of babies are literally dying weekly in Iraq as a result of sanctions?

The Attorney-General: I have seen a report of the hon. Gentleman's recent visit to Iraq. I am satisfied that the United Kingdom is complying with all its international obligations in this respect.

Mr. Rowe: Official secrets apart, will my right hon. and learned Friend give an undertaking that he will use his best endeavours with those Cabinet Ministers and former Prime Ministers who are in the business of compiling their memoirs to make them at least as vivid, prejudiced and entertaining as the memoirs which have been referred to hitherto?

The Attorney-General: An invitation like that causes me to think that my hon. Friend must be preparing something special.

Prosecutions

32. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the proportion of prosecutions which are brought to court.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): Of the 1,433,858 cases finalised in the magistrates courts in 1992-93, excluding cases received for advice only and non-criminal proceedings, 70·5 per cent. proceeded to a trial or plea, 13·5 per cent. were discontinued, 8·2 per cent. were disposed of for other reasons, including failure to trace the defendant, and a further 7·8 per cent. were committed to the Crown court.

Of the Crown court cases, 88·1 per cent. proceeded to trial or plea, 8·1 per cent. were terminated and a further 3·8 per cent. were disposed of for other reasons.

Mr. Arnold: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware of the considerable disquiet among the public and the police about the determination of the Crown Prosecution Service strongly to prosecute cases?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Crown Prosecution Service was set up by the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 as an independent prosecution service. It was given a new power under section 23 of the Act to discontinue proceedings and it does so without fear or favour. There is absolutely no reason or point in bringing to trial cases that will foreseeably fail. It is not in the interests of the victim, the defendant, the public and certainly not the police.

Mr. Ray Powell: Is the Minister aware of a Crown court decision taken last week by Judge Kilroy who sentenced a wolf-whistler to two weeks' imprisonment? The wolf-whistler, who whistled at one of my constituents—who was quite happy with the situation—is appealing against the judge's decision of 14 days' imprisonment for whistling in court. What will the Attorney-General do about that?

The Solicitor-General: That is not a matter for any of the Law Officers. It does not fall within their responsibilities.

Crown Prosecution Service

33. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on equal opportunity policy in the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is an equal opportunities employer and recruits and promotes staff on merit regardless of race, gender or disability.

Mr. Burns: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is enlightening that the Director of Public Prosecutions, the head of the Crown Prosecution Service, is female? Could he tell us more about the flexible practices that the CPS exercises to encourage and facilitate the employment of female staff?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is right. The Crown Prosecution Service is led by an energetic, dedicated and articulate Director of Public Prosecutions who was selected in open competition and was awarded her post on merit. There are many initiatives to make a post more attractive to women. Over 60 per cent. of people in the Crown Prosecution Service are women. About 40 per cent. of its lawyers, including 33 per cent. of principal Crown prosecutors, are women.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

37. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional resources his Department is able to deploy to relieve famine and starvation in the Sudan.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): On 18 March, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development made a further pledge of £4 million to support the work of non-governmental organisations and international agencies in Sudan.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister recognise that the appalling suffering in Sudan demands firm and concerted international action? What are the Government doing to help to bring maximum pressure to bear on the Sudanese Government to respect the rule of law and the rights of all their citizens and to allow free and unfettered access by the international aid organisations to bring aid to those in need?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 6 May, the Government and, I am sure, the whole House, fully share the fears expressed by the hon. Gentleman about the suffering in Sudan. We have taken a leading role in measures adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights. We have warned the Sudanese Government in strong terms against further interference with the free passage of international aid. Only last week Dr. Garang, the SPLA leader, who was in London, was given a similar warning about those problems by officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

South Africa

38. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional resources Her Majesty's Government have made available for preparation and training for the introduction of democracy in South Africa following the end of apartheid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The objective of our aid programme is to help prepare black South Africans for a democratic and non-racial South Africa. We expect to increase aid to support the process.

Mr. Pike: The Minister will have had discussions with Nelson Mandela when he was in this country recently. Obviously, the date and the timetable for the election are likely to be announced soon. Will the Government respond rapidly to ensure that the black people who will form the majority Government in South Africa in the near future are given every possible assistance with their responsibilities after that election?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, it has been declared that by 4 June the date should be set for elections that must take place before 4 June next year. If there are requests from the transitional executive council for assistance with election work they will be favourably considered by my right hon. and noble Friend when the elections take place. No doubt the hon. Gentleman is aware that we provide substantial assistance for the education of young South Africans. Some 1,000 scholarships a year are provided through funds from our bilateral programme, which assists towards the future of South Africa.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that as funds in the Exchequer are tight, it is wrong to divert money from our overseas budget for humanitarian aid simply to help train people in this area? Surely our priorities must be carefully considered when money is so tight.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Priorities must always be carefully considered. I take my hon. Friend's point. Our aid in this area is, however, expected to rise to reflect support for the evolving political, economic and social reform process.

Sir David Steel: While paying tribute to the work done by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in promoting multi-party democracy, does the Minister agree that, in its first year of operation, it has tended to bias its expenditure—perhaps necessarily—toward eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union? Will the Minister give an assurance that Government funds will now be directed to Africa in general and South Africa in particular?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There are many demands on the aid programme and the Westminster Foundation is a necessary ingredient of the aid programme. I have no doubt that the problems of South Africa and Africa generally will not be neglected.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I echo the remarks of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Launderdale (Sir D. Steel) about the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, having benefited from visiting South Africa under its auspices? There is much appreciation in South Africa for what this country and the European Community aid office is doing. Is it possible to

help refocus the South African Broadcasting Corporation? At present, it is not trusted and, as it will be the principal means of getting information to the people before the elections, it requires a degree of respect, which can only come with help from the World Service and the BBC in general.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I will ensure that my hon. Friend's point is carefully considered.

Mr. Meacher: Do the junior Minister and the Government recognise the huge reconstruction programme that will be necessary in South Africa, once the elections have been held, for housing, education, health and employment services for the black majority? Will the Minister give an absolute guarantee—which he did not give in answer to a previous question—that any aid and development moneys now focused on South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa will not be transferred to Russia or eastern Europe, where average per capita incomes are 10 times higher? Will he press for the early establishment of the transitional executive council and make it his policy that there will be no further offers of loans, tariff concessions, debt rescheduling, or any similar aid, until the transitional executive council is in place? Above all, will the Minister make it clear that the Government have learnt from the bitter lessons of Angola and Mozambique that transition to full democracy for the first time cannot be achieved on the cheap?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am surprised by the tone of the hon. Gentleman's question. He knows that the African National Congress has asked for the lifting of trade and financial sanctions upon formation of the transitional executive council. To suggest that, somehow, we should delay any further—which is the hint behind the hon. Gentleman's question—is quite absurd. When that happens we will be pressing for precisely that. We are planning new programmes at the moment in areas such as rural development, health and small business development. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are opening a new development office in Pretoria on 7 June to manage aid to South Africa and some of the neighbouring countries. Surely that is a positive step in the direction that the hon. Gentleman wants.

Mr. Meacher: How much?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I cannot say how much and the hon. Gentleman knows that.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: May I counsel my hon. Friend to be sure that he does not rob Peter to pay Paul, particularly given our strong commitment to humanitarian aid and disaster relief? I wonder why we should commit funds so heavily to the introduction of democracy in South Africa when we must bear in mind the fact that the whole of Latin America, with the notable exception of Cuba, returned to democracy without great financial aid from this country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have not made any commitment at all; we are having a debate in which pressure is being exerted that we should.

I take my hon. Friend's point. I have made no commitments—I do not intend to—and this matter will be discussed in the light of questions today and other debates.

Tuberculosis

39. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he plans to make to the declaration by the World Health Organisation of tuberculosis as a global health emergency.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We share the concern expressed by the World Health Organisation about the increasing incidence and severity of TB. We are considering with the WHO and other Governments the resources that should be made available and how they might be used most effectively to help reduce the spread of this disease.

Mr. Corbett: May I encourage the Minister to make best speed with those considerations, given that about one third of the world's population is now infected with TB and that TB currently kills more people than heart disease and AIDS put together.

Is he aware that the World bank has estimated that the cure available for TB is one of the most cost-effective available? Does he accept that, unless the disease is also tackled in Britain and other industrialised countries—there is evidence of its coming back—there cannot be a cure in those countries where it is rampant: Latin America, Asia and Africa?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's alarm at the regrowth of the disease. I can accept the figure that he used—3 million deaths occur as a result of that dreadful disease each year. The United Kingdom is one of the largest sources of World Health Organisation extrabudgetary support. We contributed £11 million in 1992. We are anxious to see a better lead from the WHO in that regard, as the problem is of such great importance to the health of the world.

Bosnia

3.30 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the latest United Nations plan for Bosnia.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The Foreign Ministers of the United States, France, Russia and Spain, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, met in Washington on 22 May and issued a statement containing a joint programme of action on the former Yugoslavia.

They agreed to continue working urgently to halt the conflict—starting with further action in the United Nations Security Council on safe areas, monitoring of the Bosnian border with Serbia-Montenegro and the establishment of a war crimes tribunal—and to continue efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement building on the Vance-Owen process and intensified international efforts.

They reaffirmed their view that sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro should be rigorously enforced until the conditions set out by the United Nations for their review are met, including the withdrawal of Bosnian Serb troops from territories occupied by force, including the withdrawal of Bosnia-Serb troops from territories occupied by force.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, such a radical and fundamental new policy shift on Bosnia should have merited a full Government statement and not just a reply to a private notice question.

I shall set out what we welcome in what was said in Washington on Saturday. First, it is right to make it clear that aggression against Macedonia will lead to grave consequences. Would that threat not have had a little more force if we could get round to using the name of the country that the Macedonians have chosen—"Macedonia" itself?

Secondly, we welcome the recognition that there should be a greater international presence in Kosovo to protect human rights in that province of former Yugoslavia. Thirdly, it is of course right that the flames of violence should not be further fanned by lifting the arms embargo on the region, and it is good that the effort to deliver humanitarian supplies will continue.

Having said that, can I ask the Minister precisely what is the plan? Is it a plan at all, or will it not simply be seen as a cleverly constructed and diplomatically phrased climbdown in the face of the Bosnian Serb rejection of their leader's signature on the Vance-Owen plan three weeks ago in Athens?

What has happened to that plan in the light of this new policy shift? Is this the end of that plan, which was so carefully and painstakingly put together by Lord Owen and Cyrus Vance for a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzogovina? Was Lord Owen consulted about what went on in Washington? What is his view about the new plan that has been unveiled by the five countries?

Will the Minister tell us about the new proposed safe areas? For whom are they to be safe? It appears that civilians in those areas will be disarmed and any air cover supplied or offered by the United States will be restricted to the UN troops in the areas. Of course, any protection of the poor persecuted civilians in that area is welcome, but is not the proposal just a recipe for creating five or more new permanent refugee camps?

Why are we continuing to be so pathetically weak about continuing Croation aggression? Given the continuing actions of some Bosnian-Croat forces in Bosnia, surely the same ultimatums on sanctions that have been given to Belgrade should now immediately be aimed at Zagreb.

What is meant by "sealing the borders of Bosnia", when all it seems to amount to is what the communiqué says:

"We are watching to see if the border closure is effective"?

How does that stand, especially in the light of Mr. Milosevic's apparent statement that there will be a veto on all foreign observers and monitors on the border?

What about the section of the communiqué entitled, "Further measures", which speaks of keeping

"open options for new and tougher measures."

What precisely is meant by that? What are those measures and how can that be seen as a potent threat when the measures so far used, including sanctions, have been pursued with such a spectacular lack of success?

The Foreign Secretary said yesterday on the BBC:

"The Bosnian Serbs need to realise that they are not going to be able to retain what they have grabbed by force."

I ask the Minister, quite simply, how? How will that be done? Can he tell us? Can anybody tell us how that will be achieved?

Finally, what can the Minister tell the House this afternoon, and how can he reassure an increasingly puzzled and suspicious world community, who, in the light of the new policy, may well now conclude that the standing of the United Nations has been gravely undermined and that the legitimate rights of the Government of Bosnia and the people they seek to represent have been abandoned?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has given me ample opportunity to amplify the Government's position, and I am grateful to him for that. On the question of Macedonia, he will bear in mind the fact that we fought for its admission into the United Nations. Some outstanding matters need to be settled, if possible, between Greece and Macedonia, and discussions are going ahead under the chairmanship of Lord Owen to promote that.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman supported the Government's attitude towards not relaxing the arms embargo. I believe that that is right.

The hon. Gentleman asked a whole range of questions, to which I shall try to reply. However, it is important to keep in mind the fact that those on his Front Bench and those on this one agree on one thing—that it would be wrong to deploy United Kingdom or any other ground troops in a combat role. Certain consequences flow from that, and they are set out in the Washington agreement.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to explain the plan. I shall try to summarise the main elements of it—first, to continue with the humanitarian mission, which is well known to the House; secondly, to keep the sanctions in place until there has been a withdrawal from occupied territories; thirdly, the positioning of monitors on the border of Bosnia and Serbia; fourthly, the creation of safe areas—I shall say more about that in a moment; and fifthly, the setting up of a war crimes tribunal.

On the question of safe areas, we have made it plain that, if UNPROFOR troops in the safe areas are attacked, air assets will be deployed to support them. On the point about Lord Owen, he has been kept closely informed of developments, as the hon. Gentleman would expect. My

right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in frequent contact with him. Lord Owen will express his views at a time that he thinks appropriate.

On Croatia, the hon. Gentleman has a good point. We are deeply concerned by the policy adopted by the Croatian Government, and the hon. Gentleman will see that there is an express reference in the declaration to the fact that sanctions could be deployed against Croatia if policies of military expansion were continued.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the Bosnia that we voted to admit to the United Nations and whose legitimate Government we still recognise has lost about 250,000 people slain in the past year, 2·5 million displaced and countless thousands raped, and their homes pillaged? What comfort can his statement offer to those people? What signal about the powerful nature of the world order does it send out? Has not the west been tried and found wanting in the first test of the post-cold war era?

Can my right hon. and learned Friend do anything to reassure me that this is not a case of aggression rewarded? Can he do anything to reassure me that those who still sorely need protection will be afforded it?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to say that this is the greatest tragedy, the greatest crime, that Europe has seen since the end of the second world war. He has fairly asked me whether I can bring comfort. The answer is, I cannot —I wish that I could. What is going on in Bosnia is, in its principal characteristics, a civil war; and we did not think it right—nor did any other country of which I am aware —to deploy ground troops in a combat rule because this was and is a civil war. Civil wars cannot be resolved by the application of external force.

As to the future, we do not accept that the land seized by the Bosnian Serbs will remain theirs. That is why we intend to keep the sanctions on until there is a withdrawal from territories occupied—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members shout, "What about the Croats?" Them too. I have already made it plain that we think that the policies of the Croatian Government are deeply disturbing, and we have made it plain in the declaration that, if those policies are persisted with, sanctions could be deployed against them too.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Minister of State recognise why we view his statement about the belated creation of safe areas with total dismay? Does he not recall that, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) came back from Bosnia last August and argued for the creation of safe havens, they were told that that was quite impossible?

Now more territory has been grabbed from the Muslim communities, as graphically described by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), and aggression by the Serbs is going to be rewarded under the agreement now being made—so the Minister will understand the anger in this quarter of the House.

Is it intended to create a United Nations protectorate of all Muslim areas? Is it intended that the United Nations on the ground will negotiate with the Serbs and Croats to achieve just and defensible borders in the future?

Mr. Hogg: The policy of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has always called for a much more intense level of military activity than that which is now contemplated. The difficulty with the right hon. Gentleman's plan has always been that it has effectively called for the deployment of ground troops in a combat role. That is why it has not been possible to accept it. There has been no substantial support in this place or in any other country I can think of for the sort of policy that the right hon. Gentleman was advancing.

We certainly do not accept that aggression should be rewarded. We shall do our utmost in the ways that I have described already to get the Bosnian Serbs to roll back their occupation.

There are no plans for United Nations protected areas at the moment, but we will build on the Vance-Owen process, with the objective of providing security for the Bosnian Muslims and the rolling back of the Bosnian Serbs.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned that further action would depend heavily on sanctions. I am sure he is aware that anyone who has consulted with the former Yugoslavia's neighbours in the past few weeks is fully aware of substantial concern over slippage and evasion. What are the chances of tightening the screw? Can my right hon. and learned Friend say a word or two more about the war crimes tribunal, and about the possible appointment of a human rights commissioner?

Mr. Hogg: I am confident that the Security Council will establish a war crimes tribunal, but one must make the point—unpalatable though I know it is—that one can only try people if one has them within the relevant jurisdiction.

Sanctions have been a great deal more effective than has commonly been allowed. The Serbian economy has been devastated by sanctions. It is true that they have not been as completely watertight as we would wish. In particular, at the turn of the year, consignments of oil got through. Since then, we have been most effective at tightening up the sanctions in the Adriatic, by toughening the rules of engagement; on the land frontiers, by positioning sanction advisory missions and securing agreement from adjoining states; and on the Danube itself, where there has been no substantial breach of the sanctions regime.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is not the message of the agreement to aggressors and ethnic cleansers around the world, "Do your worst—you have nothing to fear from the United Nations and the international community, except bluster, dither and delay"? Does not the agreement represent a massive betrayal of the people of Bosnia—Muslim, Serb and Croat—who have seen their independent state literally go up in smoke? Does it not represent a massive defeat for the United Nations and the international community, and dash any hopes of establishing a new world order on this wretched globe of ours?

Mr. Hogg: No one can deny that we have seen both tragedy and a crime. It gives no one in this place any pleasure to know what the Serbs have done. That said, we must ask ourselves what we are prepared to do in the context of a civil war. Unless we—all nations—are prepared to deploy ground troops in a combat role, perhaps we should not embark on too much bluster.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Government are absolutely right to resist the military ambitions of some American and other television armchair warriors? Will he give an assurance that there is no question in future of British troops being further embroiled in a mad adventure which will not resolve a civil war but from which it might take years to extract our forces?

Mr. Hogg: I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend says. We will not deploy United Kingdom ground troops in a combat role. We have no plans at the moment to increase the number of United Kingdom troops in former Yugoslavia; nor have we any present plans to change the existing mandate.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): While I recognise that many right hon. and hon. Members would like to pursue in greater detail many aspects of the Washington agreement, I want to ask specifically about the war crimes tribunal. Given that between 20,000 and 30,000 women have been raped, often systematically in rape camps established for that purpose, will the British Government ensure that the details that have emerged from the United Nations, Helsinki Watch and Amnesty International will guarantee that rape becomes a war crime and that there will be no amnesty for the perpetrators of that crime as part of any deal in reaching a negotiated peace settlement?

Mr. Hogg: Rape probably already comes within the definition of a war crime. It certainly is a crime. The problem, of course, is that we must have the people to try. We are supporting the establishment of the tribunal, but the tribunal will be able to try people only if it has jurisdiction over those people. It is extraordinarily difficult to solve that practical difficulty.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the change that has been enshrined in the Washington agreement is a very substantial one? It was only a few weeks ago, was it not, that the Prime Minister of Greater Serbia, Milosevic, was able to put substantial pressure on the Bosnian Serbs.

What in the new agreement will lead to any restraint being placed on the Bosnian Serbs? Why, for example, will they still retain the right to determine who should be the United Nations monitors and where they should go? What is it that has been positively gained for those who live in the Bosnian Muslim communities over what has been offered, and apparently grabbed, by the Bosnian Serbs?

Mr. Hogg: I shall make three replies to my hon. Friend. First, we have clear unity of purpose. That is very important. It is through our collective strength that we have any chance at all of reversing aggression. Secondly, we have the concept of safe areas and the agreement to use air action to defend UNPROFOR troops should they be attacked within those safe areas. Thirdly, there is the stated principle, to which we shall adhere, that we shall not accept the annexation by force of the ground now occupied by the Bosnian Serbs, and that the sanctions will remain in place until there is a withdrawal from territory thus taken.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Has the Minister any idea at all of the strong, understandable and angry sense of betrayal that is felt by the Government of Bosnia and the people they represent? Does the Minister not understand that this is not a victory in any way for dealing with aggression? It is a victory for appeasement, it is a victory for excuses, it is a victory for allowing the aggressor to get away with it.

Despite all the right hon. and learned Gentleman's talk today about war criminals being punished, and the rest of it, the sad truth is that this is a decisive defeat, not only for the people who live in Bosnia, unfortunately, but for the international community and for the United Nations. All of us should be very ashamed of what has occurred.

Mr. Hogg: Yes, indeed, I understand the sense of pain and despair that is felt by the Bosnian Muslims. All of us in this place share much of that. What we have seen is a very brutal crime, and we have been unable to reverse it in the way we would have hoped to do. But the plain truth is —we come back to it every time—that in its essential characteristics this was a civil war. It is virtually impossible, by the application of external force, to put an end to a civil war.

The hon. Gentleman says, impliedly, that we should have done a great deal more than we did. I do not accept that criticism, but that is his point. We cannot use United Kingdom ground troops, for example, in a combat role unless the country is solidly behind such a venture. The truth is that it is not, and there is not such an opinion in this House either.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My right hon. and learned Friend said that sanctions will continue to be applied against Serbia for so long as the Serbs hold territory that is not rightfully theirs. Does that mean that Royal Air Force aircraft will continue to be deployed in theatre to maintain the air exclusion zone over Bosnia for so long as the sanctions endure?

My right hon. and learned Friend also spoke in a notably unspecific way about air action and air assets and United Kingdom ground troops. Does that mean that, if United Nations troops are attacked in the safe areas, Royal Air Force aircraft will be used in action against ground targets—in other words, in a combat role?

Mr. Hogg: On my hon. Friend's first point about how long the RAF will remain engaged, the RAF is there at the moment, along with other air forces, to enforce the no-fly zone. So long as there is a no-fly zone in place and there is the risk of breaches which might cause serious combat, it will be necessary to maintain some air enforcement.

On the question of enforcement against targets which are attacking UNPROFOR troops, my hon. Friend will know that the Government have already said of the Canadians in Srebrenica that we would rally to their support if the company were attacked by the Serbs. We are making it plain that air forces will be used to defend UNPROFOR troops should they be attacked in the safe areas designated in the resolution.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I take us back to where we were 12 months ago when the horror began? Why, after 12 months, are heavy munitions still firing on major centres of population in the former Yugoslavia? Why has that heavy equipment not been taken out?

Mr. Hogg: We come back to the point that I have stressed many times. We are talking about a civil war, and the question that the hon. Gentleman, along with everyone

else, must contemplate is the extent to which British military assets, or any other country's military asets, people, troops and airmen, should be used to prevent fighting in a civil war. There is no will in the House for that.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): May I put it to my right hon. and learned Friend that, in view of the fact that no NATO country was prepared to put combat forces on the ground in this deeply tragic situation, this seems to be much the most realistic plan so far, and the first that seems to offer some hope of ending the killing, and that it therefore cannot be regarded as wholly contemptible?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with him.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): We all know what the Vance-Owen "plan" is or was, but what, if anything, does the Vance-Owen "process" mean, especially when it is not specifically endorsed by the two men whose names it bears?

Mr. Hogg: That is a fair question. The Vance-Owen plan had within it a range of specific agreed elements, agreed at least by most of the parties, although not by the Bosnian Serbs. The Vance-Owen process has a mechanism for negotiating. I agree that it is not the same thing, but that is the difference.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Is it not yet clear that, if the international community makes it plain time and time again that, whatever happens, it will do nothing to stop the Serbs, the Serbs will go on doing exactly what they will? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that is not a civil war? Is he further aware that it is absolutely clear that the Serbs will break their word again and again?

In that context, is it not wholly inadequate merely to monitor what is happening on the border between Serbia and Bosnia, and is it not clear that effective action should be taken to ensure that the embargo on the flow of arms and resources across the border is enforced, not ineffectively monitored?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend has identified a problem that is inherent in democracies. People rightly ask of Governments what their policies are. If I were to flannel or deceive the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) would be the first to blame me. Indeed, I would be not only blamed but thoroughly criticised. In open societies—in democracies—it is jolly difficult to pursue policies other than those that one declares—or, to put it differently, one must declare what one proposes to do.

As to whether this is a civil war, it is primarily a civil war. I do not dispute for one moment that Serbia plays a prominent part in supplying fuel, arms, money and men, but it is nevertheless in its essential characteristics a civil war.

My right hon. Friend said that the Bosnian Serbs and the Serbs themselves were likely to break their word. I should have thought that there was an extremely high probability of that. That is why, when one is considering the cost in terms of human lives of trying to make peace by force, one must come to the conclusion that it would take about half a million men.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Why cannot United Nations policy be seriously built on so that the safe havens become proper safe havens, in which the population is defended, and so that the safe havens can be extended to other areas to defend people, irrespective of their ethnic background? The borders with Croatia, as well as the borders with Serbia, should be not only monitored but controlled. Should we not look to the establishment of a United Nations transitional authority?

Mr. Hogg: I agree that the policies of the Croatian Government are a matter of considerable concern, first because they have supported the Bosnian Croats, and secondly because we are anxious to see a renewal of the UNPROFOR 1 mandate in Krajina. Some of the remarks made by President Tudjman are not very assuring on that point.

On safe areas, the resolution will define a number of towns in Bosnia in respect of which we shall introduce UNPROFOR troops. As the hon. Gentleman knows, air forces will be employed to defend those troops should they be attacked.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, notwithstanding the open-ended need for help and support for the United Nations operations in Bosnia, the British Government's operation has cost between £70 million and £100 million? What other substantial contributions in cash terms have been made by the 150-odd other members of the United Nations?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend will appreciate that, if I were to give a detailed answer, I might take a longish time. My hon. Friend is saying—I entirely agree—that the British have made the most considerable troop contribution in Bosnia. We have delivered more than 36,000 tonnes of supplies, and the RAF has delivered more than 7,000 tonnes of supplies. It is universally agreed that the British service men, both the troops and the RAF, are by far the most efficient of any forces operating within Bosnia.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Would that the Foreign Secretary were here so that I could tell him to his face that he should be ashamed of himself for having put his name, and Britain's name, to this absolutely atrocious Washington agreement which totally abandons the Bosnian Muslims. What minute prospect is there of the Bosnian Serbs being forced to abandon their conquests?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has heard the hon. Gentleman on many previous occasions. I shall tell him that the hon. Gentleman has said what he has said previously.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): As somebody who witnessed some horrible scenes in another civil war only three years ago, may I put it to my right hon. and learned Friend that, even if the will existed in the House and in the country to send a large ground force to Bosnia for an indeterminate period, experience from other similar cival wars, whether in Palestine or now in Nagorno-Karabakh, suggests that the most likely outcome would be a complete and bloody failure?

The best way forward and the best hope for the Bosnians in the long run is for us all to recognise that there is no putting Bosnia back together again against the wishes of the Serbs and the Croat Bosnians who form a majority of the population. We need an ethnic partition, as has happened in Cyprus.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend has deployed clearly, and in my view rightly, the arguments against deploying ground troops in a civil war. On the second part of his question, we now need to build on what has been agreed within the Vance-Owen peace plan, and to use that process to try to carry forward a chance of a settlement.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does the Minister agree with me that there is always a risk that the conflict will spread again to Krajina and to Kosovo and Macedonia and that that risk would become an absolute certainty should there be massive intervention by the west in Bosnia-Herzegovina, because it would give succour to all the extreme forces, including extreme forces among the Albanians in Kosovo? Those who think that there is a simplistic way out of the problem in Bosnia should think before they speak. Were the detention centres discussed? How are the detainees to be released?

Mr. Hogg: I believe that the hon. Gentleman has had an opportunity to see some of the things that he has described. I agree with the broad premise that there is a serious risk of the fighting flowing into the adjoining countries, particularly Macedonia and Albania. The risk in Kosovo is very great indeed. That is one of the reasons why there is now a Nordic battalion in Macedonia and why there are CSCE observers in Kosovo. I would like to see the numbers of the latter increased. It would be better by far if we were able to get the United Nations presence into Kosovo. However, that would depend on the acquiescence of Serbia.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): For month after month, the Government have rightly supported the policy of sanctions. However, for month after month, the Government have also gone along with the European view that breaches of sanctions shall remain entirely confidential. Do the Government really believe that the policy of sanctions as opposed to war can ever prevail if that sort of attitude is maintained? May we ask whether that information can now be released as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Hogg: The policy of sanctions has been a great deal more effective than the hon. Gentleman allows. As I said earlier in response to this private notice question, the policy of sanctions has caused very considerable damage —as it was intended to—to the Serbian economy, and that will continue until there is a withdrawal from the territory that has been occupied.

With regard to the question of confidentiality, I am not absolutely clear about what the hon. Gentleman is referring to. There is one serious problem: quite often, we receive information about sanction breaches from very confidential channels. It would be extremely difficult to release that information without impugning the source. That is the problem. If there are other problems which the hon. Gentleman feels that I have not addressed in my reply, I am happy to talk to him about that.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): Is it not the case that, when the fine diplomatic words are put to one side, the new piece of paper adds up to a policy of appeasement? Surely the Minister should understand that, just as appeasement did not work 50 years ago, Europe's policy of appeasement today will not stop aggression, mass rapes or genocide?

Mr. Hogg: While there are clearly close parallels in moral terms between what has happened in Bosnia and what happened in Germany and as a result of Nazi policy, it is very wrong to regard Serbia as posing anything like the kind of strategic risk that Germany posed to Europe in the 1930s. Therefore, it is unwise to talk about appeasement in that sense. We are not embarking on a policy of war. By a range of policies, involving substantial pressure, we are seeking to get the Bosnian Serbs to withdraw from the territory that they have occupied.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on. I have an application under Standing Order No. 20 from the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble).

Bombing (Northern Ireland)

4.8 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the sequence of bombs in Northern Ireland over the weekend.

I appreciate that it is normally the practice in the House not to have immediate statements or debates on specific terrorist incidents, because that amplifies the terror created by those incidents. However, we are dealing not with "a" specific incident, but with a quite alarming series of incidents, which perhaps marks a new phase in the terrorist campaign, and it has serious implications for people in Northern Ireland.

The incidents to which I refer are, first, the bomb on Thursday in Glengall street in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), which seriously damaged the opera house and other commercial premises, as well as the headquarters of the party.

On Saturday morning, a massive bomb containing more than 1,000 lb of explosive went off in the main street of Portadown in my constituency. That bomb may result in the demolition of nine or 10 major commercial premises. The explosion took place right in the centre of the town. The so-called warnings that accompanied the bomb were consistent with an attempt by the Provisional IRA to cause massive loss of life. Thankfully, that was avoided, thanks to the skill of the police, but no thanks to the terrorists. Substantial dislocation has occurred as a result of the bomb.

That was Saturday morning. On Saturday evening, a large bomb exploded at the Drumkeen hotel. In addition to damaging the hotel, the bomb damaged several private homes, some of which were just recovering from the last explosion a matter of months before. Lastly in the sequence, last night there was a massive bomb in the town of Magherafelt in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). Again, it occurred in the town centre and caused massive disruption to commercial life.

The bombs obviously have security implications. In deference to your views, Madam Speaker, I shall not go into the security implications at this stage, except to say that a debate under Standing Order No. 20 would require Northern Ireland Office Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box and give some statement and some answer instead of their shameful silence, which demonstrates their ineptitude and incompetence.

The blockbuster bombs are part of the IRA's economic war. It has been estimated that the compensation bill will be about £20 million. The bombs will also affect the lives and livelihood of many small business men in the towns affected. For that reason, and because in recent months there has been a tendency among people at home to despair of the political process, I wish to have this urgent debate.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member has said. Of course, I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Perhaps you could help Members from Northern Ireland. Over and over again, when atrocities have been committed and there has been no response from the relevant Ministers answerable in the House, we have attempted to use Standing Order No. 20 and the old Standing Order No. 10 to bring the matter to the attention of the House. Habitually, the applications have been turned down by various Speakers before you.

Could you help Northern Ireland Members to know what must happen, what atrocity must take place, how many people must be murdered and how many millions of pounds' worth of damage must be done before we can bring the matter before the House?

Madam Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's real concern about the matter, which he has voiced for several years. As he appreciates, and, I know, understands, we do not discuss security matters across the Floor of the House.

May I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to two things? When we return from the recess on 8 June, there will be a debate on the emergency provisions Act. For an earlier opportunity to raise the matter, the hon. Gentleman can make an application to my office before 10 o'clock this evening for an Adjournment debate on Thursday this week.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): A few years ago, it was common practice that terrorist atrocities, either here or in Northern Ireland, were the subject of either a statement or a private notice question. In the application for a Standing Order No. 20 debate today, we heard a plea from a member of one of the Northern Ireland parties which agreed a few years ago to stop the discussion of any private notice question or statements by Ministers. There was an agreement between the Government and the Opposition to be silent about such atrocities. Some of us disagreed with that at the time.

We cannot accept the idea that, when people are killed in terrorist attacks of whatever nature, the House cannot debate the matter. It is ironic that the demand for a Standing Order No. 20 debate has come from a member of a party which took part in the silencing. Despite the House being silent, terrorist activities have continued to take place both here and in Northern Ireland. So the silence has not served any useful purpose. It is time we got back to discussing such matters.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to prolong a discussion. This is not a point of order. I have already dealt with the matter in connection with the point of order earlier.

Scott Inquiry (Evidence)

4.15 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My point of order arises from evidence given this morning by Sir Hal Miller to the Scott inquiry, which raises very serious matters for the House concerning the information with which the House is provided, and the deception of the House and its Committees.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman gave me notice of his point of order, and my office informed him that he was raising a serious matter that might involve a possible contempt of the House. I know that he takes that seriously, as I do. If he will write to me providing the information that he has, I shall certainly ensure that it is dealt with in the usual way in the event of there being a contempt of the House. The hon. Gentleman should not pursue the matter now, on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Cousins: I shall be guided by you, Madam Speaker.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standintg Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

National Health Service

That the National Health Service (Fund-holding Practices) Regulations 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 567) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Harefield Hospital National Health Service Trust (Transfer of Trust Property) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993 No. 820) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Insolvency

That the Insolvency (Amendment) Rules 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 602) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Education

That the Education (Individual Pupils' Achievements) (Information) (Wales) Regulations 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 835) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 998) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Fisheries and Committees

That the Local Fisheries Committee (Fees for Copy Byelaws) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 116) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

EC and San Marino

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Agreement on Customs Union and Cooperation between the European Economic Community and the Republic of San Marino) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Housing

That the draft Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (Area and Constitution) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust (Area and Constitution) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Criminal Justice

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Designated Countries and Territories) (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Drug Trafficking

That the draft Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (Designated Countries and Territories) (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Forfeiture Orders

That the draft Criminal Justice (International Cooperation) Act 1990 (Enforcement of Overseas Forfeiture Orders) (Amendment) Order 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

Civil Defence

That the draft Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

RAILWAYS BILL *[Money]* (No. 2)

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Railways Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of the following, namely—

(a) any sums required by a Minister of the Crown or Government department for the making of payments under or by virtue of the Act to the trustees or administrators of any pension scheme;

(b) any sums required by the Secretary of State for defraying expenditure of the Franchising Director—

(i) in exercising or discharging functions assigned or transferred to the Franchising Director under or by virtue of the Act;

(ii) in fulfilling guarantees given in the exercise of any such function; or

(iii) otherwise in consequence of the provisions of the Act;

(c) any sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments under agreements under which he undertakes to make payments to goods service operators in respect of track access charges;

(d) any sums required by the Secretary of State for making grants to the Board, or any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board, for the purpose of enabling the Board or subsidiary to make any payments (whether by way of repayment of principal or payment of interest or of any other description) in respect of loans made to the Board or subsidiary under section 20 of the Transport Act 1962.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Orders of the Day

Railways Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Ordered,

That the Railways Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely, New Clause No. 3, New Clause No. 29, Amendments relating to Schedule 10, other New Clauses, other Amendments to the Bill, New Schedules, Amendments relating to other Schedules to the Bill.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Madam Speaker: I have to announce a small addition to my provisional selection of amendments. In the group beginning with Government new clause 4, amendment No. 237 should be inserted immediately before Government amendment No. 110. The selection list in the Lobby already shows the change; I have made the announcement merely to help hon. Members who may have picked up an earlier version.

New clause 3

RIGHTS OF TRUSTEES OF BOARD PENSION SCHEMES

'(1) Where the Secretary of State proposes by order to amend the trust deed of any existing Board pension scheme, or the rules of any such scheme, or any other instrument relating to the constitution, management or operation of any such scheme and has consulted the trustees of the scheme but does not propose to act precisely according to their advice, he shall prepare a report setting out the advice received from the trustees and his reasons for rejecting, or accepting with modifications, that advice.

(2) Any such report shall be published and copies thereof laid before each House of Parliament.'.—*[Dr. Marek.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.16 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I think that it is a good new clause, and I hope that the Government will accept it. I also hope that you will allow me to move the new clause formally at this stage, although I may seek to catch your eye later, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: With this new clause, it will be convenient also to discuss the following: New clause 29 —*Joint industry pension scheme*—

'.—(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the Secretary of State shall not exercise any of his functions under this Act relating to pensions until he has consulted the trustees of any existing scheme (within the meaning of Schedule 10) and such other persons as may have an interest, or appear to the Secretary of State to represent persons having an interest in any existing scheme, as to the feasibility of establishing a joint industry scheme, the form such a scheme might take, and the implications for participants in existing schemes.

(2) Subsection (1) above shall not apply in any case where the trustees of a scheme have received actuarial advice that the fund may not be able to meet any of its actual or projected liabilities at any time from its actual or projected assets.'.

Government amendments Nos. 106 and 107.

Amendment No. 190, in clause 25, page 26, line 42, at end insert—

'(6) The Franchising Director shall not enter into a franchise agreement unless he is satisfied that the franchise operator will offer pension rights to future employees no less favourable than those provided by the Board pension scheme.'.

No. 253, in clause 116, page 112, line 22, after '(1)', insert

'Subject to section *(Joint industry pension scheme)*'.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Recently, Madam Speaker, you informed the House of the tragic death of Robert Adley, the former Member of Parliament for Christchurch. On a day featuring both Transport questions and the beginning of a transport debate, it is appropriate for us to place on record our respect for his memory and his contribution to transport debates—and, in particular, his views on the railways. Although those views were controversial, it is to his credit that they were always well informed and added to hon. Members' knowledge of such matters.

Robert Adley was an independent-minded Member of Parliament and a distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Transport. His judgments were reflected in the recent Select Committee report on rail privatisation. Those views, too, were controversial, and will lie at the heart of our debate over the next two days. Undoubtedly, the controversies will continue; I think that he would want them to, and would listen with a smile—as I did yesterday, when I heard the Secretary of State quote Mr. Adley on the Frost programme yesterday. I am sure that many of us will quote him in future. The Secretary of State said:

"as far as Robert Adley is concerned, whose loss we all deeply regret, I think it's interesting that the report which he had actually drawn up concluded . . . 'the government is right to give a high priority to seeking ways of improving the quality of rail services offered to both passengers and freight customers and the government is justified in examining as one possible method the scope for expanding the role of the private sector.'"

That is right, and it was mentioned in the report of the Select Committee. The late Robert Adley would have asked the Secretary of State to complete the quote; and it is important for me to put it on record for him. It continued:

"provided that this can be done without jeopardising the cohesiveness of the national network and the benefits it provides."

That interpretation lies at the heart of today's debate. There are differences of opinion on the issue. The House must be grateful for the contributions made by the late Robert Adley.

The controversy continues with today's debate, particularly in respect of pensions. Recently the newspapers have contained many pieces about how important the Bill is and what it will do for the railway industry. Clear differences of opinion have been expressed, not just between the Opposition and the Government, but between Conservative Members. Much attention has been given to whether concessionary passes should be granted and whether British Rail should have the right to bid for the franchises.

We should give attention to the question of how to treat the pensioners. It is a controversial issue, which is why we have chosen to start the debate with it. It is particularly important to do so as the Secretary of State formally moved the money resolution which will affect the Transport Act 1980 as it relates to pensions. Therefore, it seemed logical to begin the debate with a discussion on pensions. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. John Prescott]

Wrexham (Dr. Marek) for moving new clause 3. The resolution that affects the 1980 Act will implement one of the Government's changes of heart on pensions that occurred during their discussions.

I am prepared to concede that the Government have made considerable changes after listening to representations, but I do not think that they have made the fundamental change that the new clause is designed to achieve. Some of the changes relating to pensions that have been made have been welcomed by Members—both Opposition and Government—who pressed for them in Committee. Today we can judge whether the promises given by the Minister of State in Committee will be realised, particularly those relating to pensioners who belong to the closed fund—200,000 British Rail pensioners currently receive pensions from the British Rail pension fund. They are worried that the changes will make them worse off. We must make a judgment on that issue in today's debate.

Pensioners have been worried by what happened in the Maxwell and other cases. Companies have begun to realise that surpluses have accrued and have, apparently, claimed the right to use them as they think fit. Sometimes, they have done so with the agreement of the trustees. That has often meant that the chairman—whether an independent chairman or someone appointed by the company management—has used the surplus funds for other reasons. Sometimes they have used them to fund redundancies in the industry or to relieve the financial difficulties of a company during a recession. Such cases have caused a climate of fear about what is happening to pension funds. The Goode committee has been established, and the Select Committee on Social Security is considering pensions. Our present debates are made difficult because we do not yet have the conclusions of those committees. Therefore, we must press ahead with debating the Government's proposals.

The British Rail pension fund is massive, being worth about £8 billion. The Post Office and Coal Board funds are also of the same magnitude. Large amounts of assets have been deposited in the funds which are available to pensioners or to contributors. The Government have contributed to British Rail, a publicly owned industry. The resolution means that the Government will continue to contribute to the fund, which is important.

I remember when British Rail was largely funded under an unfunded system, which was common to the public sector and applied under Labour and Tory Governments. The police forces and hospitals still operate under the same system as, I think, do firemen. The Treasury has an obligation to make payments to the pension schemes, but they are not funded schemes. In 1980 it was agreed to apply the funded scheme system to British Rail. The then Minister, who is now Home Secretary, believed that the fund should no longer be the responsibility of the Government. The Government will make their contributions to the funded schemes—a yearly payment which was agreed at that time and which we now agree should continue. The schemes are of considerable size and are of interest to the Treasury.

When the Government privatised the gas, electricity and telecommunications industries, they were faced with the question of what they should do with the pension funds. There has not been a consistent approach to that. In the main, those industries did not involve multi-operators —they have usually had only one or two operators so the pension liabilities have been split between them. In the announcement today, we are presented with the possibility that the rail industry will have multi-operators who will have obligations under the Government's reorganisation scheme for apportioning the fund's assets.

Much of our complaint about the difficulty of meeting the assurance for pensioners comes from the Government's chosen way of reorganising the industry. The tax authorities have decided that the assets must be apportioned to each of the operators. Because of that difficulty and decisions that have been made, I do not think that we will be able to meet the Government's essential commitment—that pensioners in the present British Rail pension scheme will be no worse off than they are at present. It is not possible to meet that promise and that is why we have tabled this amendment.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Does my hon. Friend accept the representations that I have received from many pensioners in my constituency who belong to the railway pension fund expressing the same concern as that of my colleagues about the future security of pensions and the bonuses that the pensioners used to receive? Does he accept that that is the real concern? I hope that he will press that on the Government.

Mr. Prescott: That is the heart of the argument and I shall come to it in a moment. We must bear in mind that public pension schemes were good and, as the Secretary of State said, well managed. Because of the scale of the fund, the management of the assets—an important point is the distribution between equity and gilts—was able to put more faith in equities than gilts because gilts were not paying a great deal under this Government. Certainly, management was able to get a better rate of return under the equity arrangements. That has meant that they have had a better pay-out system.

It has been argued by employees in the privatised industries that they accepted a lower rate of pay in return for better pension provisions. They made a decision in the long term to accept a better pension provision, yet live with a lower rate of pay compared to what they may have received in the private sector. We must bear that judgment in mind when we ask whether the Government's proposals, which were announced as late as Thursday, meet the requirement that the present pensioners will be as well off in the future as they were in the past.

The concerns and failures in the past have caught up, as we have seen in the transport industry. If we look at British Rail or deregulation of the buses, evidence abounds that the break-up of the pension funds—the redistribution of the surpluses often to the management of the companies and not the employees—left the remaining employees in that industry with much inferior pension schemes. The whole purpose appears to be not to treat such schemes as a level playing field for the payment of pensions but to encourage competition for the provision of pensions, which inevitably drives down the benefits and they take the cheapest option available.

There is much evidence of that in the parts of British Rail that were privatised—catering, Travelfare, hotels and engineering. Originally, employees were told that they would be no worse off with regard to their pensions. I will

not weary the House with quotes from the industry—I did that in Committee—but the evidence is absolutely clear. That evidence persuaded the Government to keep at least some semblance of an industry-wide scheme, instead of breaking it into bits and parts. The retention of an industry-wide scheme is generally agreed and accepted, although it does not provide all the assurances that we want. I shall come to that in a moment.

Many charges have been made that the scale of the resources available is such that it will make it an attractive proposition to the Treasury. The Government have responded and said that that is not true. Their original proposition, which rapidly changed in Committee, was to have a pension fund for the existing pensioners. There are about 200,000 pensioners, and 130,000 people are still in active employment. If those assets were sequestrated and payment made by the Government instead of under a funded scheme, assets of about £4 billion would be eyed by the Treasury. It could take the money to ease its £50 billion debt on the public sector borrowing requirement and simply meet the pensioners' requirements year by year. It would not be cheap for the Treasury to do that but it would certainly ease the PSBR difficulties which will continue to increase. The money in the British Rail pension fund must look attractive, as do the billions in the pension funds of British Coal and the Post Office.

4.30 pm

Although it cannot be shown that the Government would make money from selling British Rail, perhaps they have their eye on the gold pots in the pension funds. But those funds do not belong to the Government, and that was the Government view in 1980. To take that money from pensioners and contributors, even by changing the law to do so, amounts to robbery. The proposed legislation appears to make it easy to take that money. It is an Italian solution and that is not acceptable. The funds have been built up by the enforced savings of workers and they belong to them and to no one else. That is a straightforward proposition and it is our approach to the matter.

The resources of £8·5 billion have been used to pay inflation-proof pensions and have provided real value. The Minister and the Secretary of State have agreed that the pension funds have other attractive features. The Bill has seen many changes. In Committee, we tabled many amendments to clause 116, which deals with pensions, and on the morning that the Committee met the clause was removed. It was agreed to wait for a new schedule but, during debate on the Bill, three different schedules, reflecting Government thinking on the hoof, were introduced. They wanted to pinch back their contributions under the 1980 Act, which amounted to about £70 million a year.

The money resolution shows that the Government have changed their mind about ratting on their £70 million a year contribution to the pension fund. Under the 1980 Act, the Government were obliged to pay that amount each year. The Secretary of State looks surprised. I shall give way to him if he wishes to intervene. He does not. Perhaps the little look of surprise was just for the telly.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. John MacGregor): There has been no change at all as I shall explain later. We clearly set out a variety of options in a consultation document in January, and said that we would recognise our commitment in the money resolution. We have recognised that commitment from the beginning.

Mr. Prescott: The Government had intended that there would be no future commitment under the 1980 Act. The money resolution must be to change something and, if it does anything, it must restore the position that we thought existed under the 1980 Act—an obligation to pay. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) debated the money resolution on Second Reading, and presumably it suggested that the obligation under the 1980 Act would end. That is the only reason for a money resolution at this stage. I am thinking on my feet, but what else would it be for?

In Committee we discussed the Government's obligation to pay and, for whatever reason, the Government have decided to continue to pay the £70 million a year. The only reason for the debate is that the Government were thinking of discontinuing their payments, otherwise what the hell are we talking about?

Under the 1980 Act, the Government offered the pensioners two options. They said, "If you take option 2, we shall consider that we have an obligation to pay your pension." The fund could then be closed and, presumably, the assets could go to the Government. The Government have now announced that they will not continue with option 2 because they believe that the pensioners have decided, after consultation, that that is not the option that they wish to pursue.

Option 1 would allow the fund to remain in the scheme and take its chance on future payments. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) tabled an amendment to option 1 because he wanted a guarantee that the pensioners would not be any worse off and that whatever assets were apportioned would be sufficient at least to guarantee the same payments and benefits as those given under the British Rail scheme in its new form. The hon. Member for Eastleigh has been fighting on a fair point, but I do not believe that he has secured that guarantee. He has to buy a pig in a poke and believe a Government promise—a tricky thing to do in this day and age. I do not think that that promise offers sufficient protection for his constituents, who made it clear that that is the guarantee they want from the Government.

Last week, the Government said in a parliamentary reply that they wished to honour that agreement. They have not gone out of their way to do that. Whether it will be honoured, I do not know—perhaps the Secretary of State could give an assurance about that. The difficulties that we are having over the pension fund have come about solely because the tax authorities have decided that, if one wishes to keep the railways and Railtrack as independent bodies and set up private companies, they believe that there is nothing in common between those companies and that, therefore, there cannot be an industry-wide scheme unless the assets of the pension fund are apportioned. The difficulties and uncertainties are arising out of that decision. That is what we must address.

The Minister has said that option 2 is not acceptable. Last Thursday we received a parliamentary reply in which he made it clear that option 2 was not acceptable and that he would concentrate his mind on option 1. This would mean that, instead of allowing pensioners' money to be kept in a separate fund, and protected from any other influence, that money could now remain in the British Rail

[Mr. Prescott]

industry scheme. Because of that promise, option 1 now turns out to be worse than option 2 because at least under that option the Government guaranteed that the pension would be inflation free. The Government said that, whatever the inflation rate, they would see that the pension was paid. Now, there is no such continuing obligation.

What pension fund can guarantee that it will be able to pay out pensions inflation free? It has to look at the circumstances of and the return on its investments and the balance between equities and gilts. It cannot know for sure what will happen. For example, consider the actuaries' assessment of the British Telecom fund. Everyone thought that it had a massive surplus. Now we are told that, for a number of reasons, it is not judged to be in surplus by the actuaries. The judgment of the last assessment in 1990 showed earnings of between 1·5 and 2 per cent. less on equities than they received. So, to that extent, the fund is in real difficulties in maintaining a surplus. The growth in the economy has not been as great as predicted. The actuaries made a judgment—based on what the Government had told them—believing that the recession was over and the green shoots were coming up. Well, they got it wrong, and clearly many others have as well.

The number of redundancies that have occurred in the country mean that liabilities have increased considerably, especially where pension funds are being used to fund redundancies. British Coal has made a controversial application to use the pension fund to fund redundancies. Consideration is also being given to using the British Rail pension fund to fund redundancies or to finance management buy-outs. That is unacceptable and I hope that the Secretary of State will make it clear that the fund will not be used to fund mangement buy-outs or to fund any redundancies that might be associated with the reorganisation. If that were to happen, funds would be taken away from pensions and used for industrial reorganisation. I think that the House would find that totally unacceptable. The Goode committee is addressing that issue and I hope that the Select Committee on Social Security will also want to make it clear that that is not a realistic proposition.

Mr. Stephen Milligan (Eastleigh): I am having a little difficulty following the hon. Gentleman's argument. A moment ago he said that option 2 amounted to robbery by the Government. Now he is saying that it is a rather more attractive option than the Government's option. Will he explain that? Is he aware that the trustees have said that they are extremely pleased with the announcement that the Government made on Thursday?

Mr. Prescott: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am talking to the trustees, just as he is. What I am saying is quite consistent with what the trustees have said to me. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to progress with the argument about the difference between option 1 and option 2. That argument is important for the pensioners and for those who wish to vote tonight.

We all thought that the guarantee on inflation sounded attractive, but the pensioners rejected that for a number of reasons. They have always received benefits which are greater than inflation, so they do not want anything less. Now, there is no guarantee on inflation and the scheme will pay only on a promise of what is given in the total fund. That will be possible only if the assets in the fund can meet the commitment. If the industrial fund cannot pay, I am sure that the Government will not step in and meet the difference between what the closed fund's obligations are and what it has to meet those obligations. There are real difficulties.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh is right to point out the dilemma, but the problem is that we shall not know whether the Government are pinching the assets until we see the regulations that will arise from the Bill. The Government have made it clear that the industry-wide single fund will not remain. People will stay in that for a while, but the Government have argued that, because the number of pensioners is greater than the number of full-time employees, instability may occur in the fund. One may wish to separate it completely from the fund—its management, its liabilities or its commitment. That is a fair point, but we shall not know for sure until the order comes before the House.

We have to buy a pig in a poke. In Committee, the hon. Member for Eastleigh voted against the opportunity to put into statutory form the promise that he has made to his constituents. We were told to wait until Report. We are here, and now we are told—as I told the hon. Gentleman in Committee that we would be told—that we should wait until some other time. We cannot judge the Government's intention until we see the order, but the House will not be able to amend that order. All that we can do is vote for or against it after a one and a half hour debate. We had to fight to get that.

Originally, the Government intended that the regulations should be set out in orders that would be drawn up in what we call the negative form, which meant no guarantee of a vote. We has to get the Government to change that. I have no doubt that the Treasury, whose hand is behind all this—it has little to do with the Department of Transport—does not want a debate that will allow justice and fairness to come into our judgment about the distribution of money.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh has to decide whether he will rely on the promise from the Secretary of State and accept the regulations or whether he will vote tonight to ensure that the rights for which his pensioners are asking are to be guaranteed and controlled by the trustees. At the moment, the only obligation on the Secretary of State is to discuss those matters with the trustees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham tabled a new clause to deal with that matter. All the signs are that the Government may wish to accept it. I hope that they do, because it will ensure that the trustees are consulted. I want to go much further than that. I want to give the trustees who are appointed by the contributors the right to make decisions themselves and to be able to say that if they believe there are sufficient funds to meet the obligations to pensioners, they will continue to meet those obligations. They should not have to accept an order from the Government telling them to separate, and should do that only if there is an instability in the fund and the actuarial authorities say that a position cannot be maintained. That is fair enough. If the actuarial authorities have come to that judgment—we cannot know what will happen in the next 10 years—we shall have given them that authority in pension legislation. However, if they do not do that, what right have the Government to make a judgment about defaulting on those agreements?

The Minister said in Committee that people could pay into the pension fund in the same way as firemen, nurses and the police pay into theirs. In the language of pensions, that means an unfunded scheme. That means that the assets that will be transferred with the pensioners will be available to somebody. They may stay in the pension book as part of the public sector financing and, even if the money is not directly transferred to the Treasury, it will become part of the assets against the public sector borowing requirement liabilities. Even if it is kept in a separate fund, the liability over the long term for pensioners will be a yearly payment.

The £4 billion worth of assets will be discounted in public funancing under assets and liabilities. It would achieve for the Treasury what it wants. I think that that is the whole purpose of the exercise. The Government did not do that when they sold off the electricity, gas and water industries because they were making quite a lot of money selling those industries. The Treasury was the main beneficiary of that. In this sell-off, they will get no money for the industry. We know from the consultants' report and what the Minister has admitted that it will cost the country more to run a railway industry under privatisation, for many reasons, including bureaucracy, profits, and paying people. Where will the money come from? It will come from the pensioners, from the pots of gold that do not belong to the Government. We disagree with that.

4.45 pm

The Minister told us in Committee that the Bill will ensure no less favourable future pensions benefits. If he looks at how the pension fund is managed and at what he promised in his reply, he will find that the very nature of the funds is such that, under the options, he will have to agree that they will not be in a position to meet some of their obligations. For example, there may be instability in the fund. We have made it clear that if there is instability, the actuarial authorities and the trustees should tell us.

Our difficulty is that we do not trust the Government. We believe that, by breaking up the pension fund industrial scheme, they will weaken its ability to earn the right kind of income with the right kind of balance between equity and gilts—more loaded towards the former than the latter. The breaking up of assets, proposed solely to meet the privatisation of rail, will weaken the structure of the pension fund. The nature of gilts is that one gets less of a return, although it is more certain. The problem with equity is that, while one may get a bigger return, one will take a bigger gamble. If the fund is large enough to take the risk, as has been the case with the pension fund, it can get a greater benefit with that balance than from buying only gilts, on which many pension funds rely. If that is the case, the fund will not be able to meet the extra values that are over the rate of inflation. That is the nature of the fund.

Another important factor about the fund is that its contributions meet its commitments. Therefore, it has never had to sell off assets. It has been able to live from its returns. It one changes the balance—it is about 80 per cent. equity and 20 per cent. gilts—and splits the assets in the way suggested, the balance will be switched to 80 per cent. gilts and 20 per cent. equity. The consequences for the pension fund and its earnings will be considerable.

The fund will not be able to meet the extra benefits that people have got used to. Therefore, the promise that they will be no worse off will not be met and those in the closed pension funds—the ones with whom we are more materially concerned—will suffer most. Unless the Government say that they will apportion the assets to the closed pension funds—that is, to existing pensioners—and that if the existing railway fund pays better benefits, greater than the earnings can justify under the closed pension fund, they will make up the difference and meet that commitment, they will have made a blue chip promise. We would accept that. I do not think that they will say that. They will say that it is nothing to do with them, and the splitting up of the assets and the breaking up of the security of the fund will mean that the commitment cannot be met.

Mr. Milligan: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that a proper allocation of the pension fund assets is absolutely crucial. However, his argument about the balance between gilts and equities was the same argument that he used in Committee against the previous proposal for a closed fund. The whole point of the Government's new proposal is that combining existing pensioners with those who continue to work for the rump British Rail—and therefore continue to pay contributions—will enable the trustees to continue to invest in a mixture of equities and gilts, as they have done previously.

Mr. Prescott: An essential point is involved in this argument, which I hope the Secretary of State will clarify. The pension scheme will still be a closed fund; it will simply be managed by the industry fund. Assets will be allocated to existing pensioners, but they will not continue in the broad strength of the industry fund—*[Interruption.]* I want the Secretary of State to clarify the issue. My understanding is that the assets will be apportioned, probably under an order laid in the House, but eventually it will be a closed fund. In fact, I understand that that will happen before 1 April 1994, when most of the changes will occur. That closed fund, with its own assets, will be managed by the industry fund, so it will have the limitations that I have described. I agree that I have difficulty making my remarks today consistent with what I said in Committee, but that is because the Government have changed their position again. They constantly change position and we have to live with that. The hon. Member for Eastleigh knows that there have been changes virtually from day to day, so we do not have sufficient time properly to consider them.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that the assets will be broken up and given to the closed fund under an order laid in the House—which we assume he will lay before April 1994—so the possibility of the fund meeting its commitments will be determined by how much money the trustees can earn from the balance of assets and equities in the fund. That is a powerful judgment. Bigger funds have a better chance of achieving that. As a fund becomes smaller, the judgment becomes more difficult.

We must bear in mind what happens with closed and open funds. With an open fund, contributions come in and contributions go out. With a closed fund, no contributions come in other than the fund's earnings. There is no revenue from employee contributions. If the earnings of the fund are less than the amount paid out in benefits in the industrywide scheme, the fund cannot meet them. Indeed, no actuarial authority would allow it to be so unless the Government guarantee to meet the shortfall. They will not give that guarantee.

[Mr. Prescott]

The hon. Member for Eastleigh may be satisfied with the Secretary of State's promise, but the assets may not live up to that promise. We will not know until the order is laid. I ask the hon. Gentleman to join with us tonight and support us in trying to ensure that if there is a difficulty, the judgment will be that of the actuarial authorities, not of the Secretary of State. I would prefer the judgment to be in the hands of those who have to justify their action rather than in the hands of a Secretary of State who will simply bring a one-and-a-half-hour order before the House and bulldoze it through. There would be no justice for the pensioners in that.

I say to the hon. Member for Eastleigh, beware of what the Treasury is doing. It is after the assets in the pension fund, but they do not belong to the Treasury. The hon. Gentleman has a choice tonight: he can either join us in trying to effect an insurance policy to protect the pensioners or he can accept the rhetoric of his Secretary of State, who gives him promises but nothing to back them up.

Mr. MacGregor: I join the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) in his opening remarks about our late colleague, Robert Adley. As we embark on this Report state, we are all conscious of his very sad death. He took a great interest in all transport matters. I and, I am sure, all hon. Members pay tribute to him for all that he achieved. He had a deep knowledge of and passionate commitment to transport, but his greatest enthusiasm was for railways.

The hon. Gentleman said that Robert Adley and I had differences of view on some aspects of our proposals for the reform of British Rail. I quoted the key passages on television yesterday——

Mr. Prescott: Why not all of them?

Mr. MacGregor: Because it was a short programme. I should have been quite happy to quote all the passages, on many of which Robert Adley and I agreed. Indeed, about four fifths of the Select Committee's recommendations have been accepted either in whole or in part. There is no doubt that Robert Adley made a very constructive contribution and we agreed on many matters. We disagreed about vertical integration and one or two other issues, but it is possible to have two different but genuinely held views about vertical integration.

The most important point is that Robert Adley brought his great knowledge to the House with great enthusiasm. He was a bubbly character. I had the pleasure of sharing an office with him when I first came to the House. He did not just serve the House well on transport matters; he served the House with distinction in many other ways and he will be greatly missed. I am sure that we all wish to convey our heartfelt sympathies to his widow Jane and his family.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Those of us who served with Robert Adley on the Select Committee learned to appreciate his total commitment to transport and his clear view about privatisation. I want to put on record the fact that we believe that the enormous work that he did on the Select Committee report and the pressures that were brought to bear on him unfortunately and undoubtedly had some effect.

Mr. MacGregor: I certainly hope that that was not the case, but that underlines the detailed work that he put into the Select Committee—and, indeed, into every other cause in which he believed.

The Government are prepared to accept, in principle, the intentions behind new clause 3 and amendment No. 2, tabled by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). They require a report to be published and laid before the House before an order can be made to amend the trust deed for the rules of any existing board pension scheme, contrary to the advice of the trustees.

It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I cannot recommend acceptance of new clause 3 as drafted, for three technical reasons. First, it would sit better as a paragraph in schedule 10 rather than as a complete new clause. Secondly, the phrase "existing board pension scheme" is not defined in the Bill, whereas "existing scheme" is defined in paragraph 1(1) of schedule 10. Thirdly, I am advised that it would be unwise to use the word "precisely" in primary legislation. Who can judge what "precisely" means? In any case, it would be better to publish the trustees' advice, whether or not it is accepted.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is my intention to accept the clear spirit of the new clause and the amendment. I assure the House that the Government will be in close touch with the trustees on such matters and will wish to bring their views to the attention of the House when laying any relevant draft statutory instruments. We would also wish to explain the reasons for not wholly accepting their advice. Of course, that position may never arise; it is hypothetical.

I want to give further thought to the best method of achieving the intentions of the new clause, both in publication and announcement, and to bring forward a suitably drafted amendment at a later stage in the other place. I give a firm undertaking to do so. I hope that, with that assurance, the hon. Gentleman will not wish to press his new clause.

I cannot be quite so charitable to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. I welcomed his opening remarks, which acknowledged the Government's position on so many of the issues in our final pension proposal, agreed and announced last week. However, that greatly contrasted with his quite outrageous remarks on "Newsnight" on Friday night and on "Breakfast with Frost" yesterday. He repeated some of these comments in his later remarks today. He said on "Newsnight"—I shall leave out a tiny bit of the quote—*[Interruption.]* All right, I shall read the whole quote. He said:

> "So the only money that's available—and there is money available in the railways, Post Office and the Coal Board—is in the pension funds, something like £4 billion in each one of them, and what the Government is about to do is to raid the pension funds of £4 billion each."

The hon. Gentleman said on "Breakfast with Frost" yesterday:

> "Something like £8 billion belongs to British Rail pensioners and they are carving up the pension funds to get £4 billion off the pensions and into the Treasury."

Those remarks were outrageous on two counts. First, his remarks were not true; it was scaremongering of the sort to which we have become accustomed in recent months, especially with pensions. Secondly, he raised quite unnecessary fears and concern among vulnerable sections of the community—British Rail pensioners who are dependent on their British Rail and state pensions.

From the beginning, I have gone out of my way to make it quite clear that the Government have no intention of doing what the hon. Gentleman has suggested, yet even after he saw the published proposals on Thursday he continued to repeat his allegations. I can only assume that he had not read our conclusions on Thursday. I should like to take him through the facts because they are terribly important.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If the right hon. Gentleman's statement on Friday was so important and comprehensive and would have stilled pensioners' fears, why did he not come to the House to make it? Why did we have to discover it in a written answer at the back of *Hansard*?

5 pm

Mr. MacGregor: We were informing the House of our conclusions so that we could hold this debate today. I want to make the position absolutely clear. I gave a pledge at the outset, and I have repeated it in the House more than once, that British Rail's pension funds would not be used for any purpose besides paying pensions. In January, we produced our pensions document. It was clearly a consultation document in which we raised a number of issues and outlined two main options. It cannot be argued that we have done a U-turn or effected any changes since then. What is the point of offering options and going out to consultation unless, ultimately, we make a decision on one or other of those options?

The two main options were the closed fund in due course and a Government offer of a guarantee of index-linked pensions to all British Rail pensioners. We offered pensioners a fair and open choice. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East put his finger today on the difference between British Rail's privatisation in respect of pension funds and the privatisation of electricity. As he rightly said, the area board structure of electricity meant that the employees involved in that industry were not to be split up into all sorts of different organisations, so there was no need for a variety of pension funds. The hon. Gentleman rightly identified the fact that the Inland Revenue would not allow employers to cross-subsidise or deploy cross-arrangements as between one pension fund and another. That Inland Revenue rule is designed to avoid the risk of unfair treatment in the use of taxation.

Clearly, then, with British Rail we were faced with a situation that was not paralleled by electricity. We therefore had to find another solution. That is why, genuinely, fairly and openly, we offered these two alternatives to existing pensioners. It was not possible to say that they could for all time participate in open funds in which employees also participate because, with a large number of pension funds, and the large number of British Rail pensioners whom the hon. Gentleman correctly identified, that could overwhelm some of the new pension fund arrangements for employees. That is why, under the first option, in due course the fund has to become a closed fund.

In order to assure pensioners that there was an alternative of a guaranteed index-linked pension—all this is spelt out in the document—we offered the same sort of arrangements to British Rail's existing pensioners as obtain for the civil service. Clearly, the Government cannot undertake the liabilities that would arise in this respect without the transfer of the assets that were available in the pension fund to meet the pensions in the first place. I have had discussions with the pension trustees and with a great many others since the document was produced in January. They have recognised straight away that assets have to flow if liabilities are being incurred. If the Government, therefore, were to offer guaranteed index-linked pensions, they clearly had to have the right assets to pay for them. The process would be carried out independently, based on actuarial advice on all sides. That is why it was outrageous to say that the Government were going to purloin pension funds and use them for other purposes.

But the issue went further than that. Having consulted widely, I came to the conclusion that, as the second option, which had been fairly offered, was not favoured by most of those who responded to the document—a few did favour it—and as most preferred the first option, it was right to accept the option that most people wanted. That is what we announced on Thursday and it meant that there was no possibility, on Friday, Sunday or today, of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East correctly arguing that the Government were taking over pension fund money to use it for other purposes.

Even so, the hon. Gentleman went on putting out his scare story, and at one point this afternoon he did it again. I want to ask him an important question—important from the point of view of pensioners. Given the background that I have outlined and the fact that the first option is the one that we have chosen, there can be no case for saying that the Government are taking 4 billion away from the pensions and putting it into the Treasury. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that allegation because it is not in the interests of pensioners or of anyone else to believe it. I invite him to withdraw it, now or at the end of the debate

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Mr. Prescott: I shall deal with it at the end of the debate.

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will then be able to reach agreement with me on various other aspects of pensions, too.

I want to talk about our conclusions based on the consultations that we held with trustees, the British Railways Board, large numbers of pension organisations and the rail unions. The Minister of State and I met the unions at least twice, and we have certainly consulted widely. That those consultations were genuine is shown by the fact that our conclusions met at least 90 per cent.—probably more—of the requests put to us. We could not accede to one or two of them, but the reasons for that were understood. I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) for what he said about the pension trustees' approach to what we have done. They understand how far we have gone to meet all their concerns.

It would never be—it never was—any part of my purpose to take away from pensioners any of their pension funds. I understand only too well how important pensions are to them and to existing employees. That is why I was anxious to reach the best possible arrangements within the terms of the new reforms.

Mr. Prescott: The right hon. Gentleman has said that people who are existing employees of British Rail and who go to another employer in the reorganisation will still

[Mr. Prescott]

belong, if they want to, to the British Rail fund—that is described as an indefeasible right. The industry welcomes that. Can the right hon. Gentleman, however, assure us that that right is not time limited? A document sent to his Department suggests that it might be.

Mr. MacGregor: If people choose to stay in the joint industry scheme, they can do so—that is the indefeasible right. I am happy to make that clear.

As requested by almost all the interested parties, we will set up a joint industry scheme for the railways to succeed the British Rail scheme. I know that that has been widely welcomed. We have made it clear that staff serving when the Bill gains Royal Assent will have a right to remain in the scheme while they are still in the railway industry. That is what is meant by an indefeasible right—the right of existing employees to remain in the joint industry scheme. Both it and any scheme subsequently set up by employers must offer benefits no less favourable than those in the existing scheme to people who are members of the scheme when the Bill gains Royal Assent. There will be no penalties for involuntary breaks in employment. The matching of additional voluntary contributions—known as the British Rail additional superannuation scheme—will continue, and there will be safeguards for pension funds when franchises change hands. That is a clear set of commitments to employees.

As for new employees entering the railway industry, it will be for employers to negotiate their own arrangements with them. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has tabled an amendment on that aspect, but as he did not refer to it, I shall not do so either now—but I make that point clear.

On pensioners, I have already said that we are going for option 1, so there is no question of any funds being transferred to the Government in return for a Government commitment on a guaranteed, inflation-proof pension. It is correct to say that pensioners will eventually enter the closed scheme—I will explain why later—but they will remain with British Rail employees in the short term and the closed scheme will be managed as part of the joint industry scheme.

The funds will continue to be managed by representative trustees, as now. The division of the funds to reflect the trustees' liabilities and decisions will occur in due course, after a new revaluation. A revaluation is currently under way, and clearly we must wait for it to be completed. I make it absolutely clear that the fund splits will be based on independent actuarial advice, as one would expect. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, Government contributions under the Transport Act 1980 will continue. I shall explain shortly the purpose of the Ways and Means resolution and the new clause that has been tabled.

We have met fairly well, with one exception, the main requests made of us. The orders for putting those schemes into effect will be subject to statutory consultation with the trustees—I will refer again to that point in relation to the hon. Gentleman's amendment—and to affirmative resolution of both Houses.

I cannot accept new clause 29 and the consequential amendment No. 253, because there is no need for them—the purpose has been covered already. The concept of the joint industry scheme is wanted by everyone whom we consulted. In particular, the British Railways Board and the railway trade unions were keen for such a joint scheme, which they felt could best continue to provide the benefits that staff already enjoy. I made clear in my written answer last week, as earlier, that the scheme will be established.

Consultation with the board and with the trustees has already begun and will continue until the joint industry scheme is formally established. We make it clear in the Bill that Parliament will have an opportunity to debate the statutory order establishing the scheme, because all such orders will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. If the trustees disagree with any part, then, in the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's amendment, we will report to Parliament and that will be reflected in an amendment in another place.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to the aftermath of the Maxwell affair and to the Goode committee. He made a fair point, and I understand the concern among pensioners as a result of that affair. My constituents have been affected and I have had many surgery and other discussions with them. That is why I was particularly cross that Opposition Members tried to stir up unnecessary fears among pensioners.

When the Goode committee reports, the timing will be such that we should be able to take into account those recommendations that are accepted in any of the arrangements when we come to deal with the orders. In other words, I hope that we will be able to reflect that committee's recommendations.

New clause 29 is therefore redundant. We have already given our commitment to consult and that consultation has already begun. This afternoon, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made different points—and they are not relevant to the new clause. I do not see how it would achieve the objective that he set himself this afternoon. It is therefore redundant in more than one way.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State will know the difficulty of devising acceptable new clauses. If he will take that new clause together with many amendments, he will see that we chose to make one principal point—that nothing can move on the right hon. Gentleman's order unless the actuarial authorities say that there is instability. All the other points are embodied in later amendments. Given the limited time available for debate, we cannot discuss them all because there is much to cover in two days—as the Secretary of State knows from our negotiations.

Mr. MacGregor: I know also that pensions are very complicated. As to actuarial instability, the actuaries must address that key issue when they come to the eventual split of the funds. They would not want to establish a closed fund that was inherently unstable. Clearly, the trustees will be watchful on that issue.

As to the "no less favourable" question, I will be completely fair with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Prescott: This will be the first time.

Mr. MacGregor: I am always fair with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will be fair and withdraw his accusations later.

Mr. Prescott: There would be no reason.

5.15 pm

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman knows that his accusations were wrong—but I suppose that it would be a precedent for him to withdraw them, knowing that he is wrong.

I want to be fair about the hon. Gentleman's specific point. He rightly explained why we could not distribute the pension liabilities of existing pensioners around a whole series of funds. We had to find another solution, and we offered two options. The solution adopted is to move eventually to a closed fund.

The hon. Gentleman tried to argue that that would not give pensioners a "no less favourable" commitment—but by that, we mean retail prices indexed. Also, if there is a surplus in the fund at any time, the trustees can decide what can be distributed from that surplus. There is never any guarantee about a pension fund's future performance, but there are 60 closed funds in British Rail at present. Their history is good and they have been able to find surpluses, despite the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised as to the balance between equities and gilts—I well understand that point, which is why we are allowing time for moving to a closed fund.

We have found the right solution and the one that pensioners, pension fund trustees and others want. We have gone for the closed fund because that is the only way under the new arrangements. The hon. Gentleman's new clauses would not make any difference.

As the hon. Gentleman did not raise amendment No. 190, I will not refer to it, but I revealed that we could not accept it.

As to Government amendments Nos. 106 and 107, we have already said that we intend to continue payments in support of the historic underfunding of British Rail pension schemes. The purpose of the amendments—this touches on the hon. Gentleman's point about the Ways and Means resolution—is to take account of changes in future pension arrangements that will occur on privatisation.

It is a matter not of changing our mind and deciding to continue the Government's commitment to payments to support that historic underfunding but of recognising that we had to make changes to the Bill to enable that commitment to continue under the new arrangements. Having realised that, we needed a Ways and Means resolution to put the amendments forward. That is the reason and no other. It is actually quite technical.

As the hon. Gentleman said, those support payments date back to the 1974 capital reconstruction of British Rail, when the Government decided that British Rail would be unable to meet all the pension liabilities inherited under the Transport Act 1962 and therefore assumed responsibility for funding the unfunded portion of the pre-1975 pension obligations. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is with me so far; this can get a little complicated.

Those obligations included pensions, the cost of some early retirement schemes and the provision of cost-of-living increases for pensioners from some early BR schemes that had no provision for index linking. The method of payment of Government support was changed by the Transport Act 1980 because the Public Accounts Committee criticised the previous system, particularly on the ground that it involved payments being made in advance of need.

Payments are therefore currently made on an emerging cost basis—*[Interruption.]* I am talking about the PAC, not the public sector borrowing requirement, and about the propriety of Government funding. Payments were made on that emerging cost basis so that the Government's contribution is made only as and when payments are made to pensioners. Those arrangements can be changed again only by further primary legislation. Payments made since 1981 total £1·3 billion at present-day prices. I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East acknowledges that that is a substantial contribution.

Mr. Prescott: But it is an obligation.

Mr. MacGregor: I grant that, but it is a very large contribution.

Under the 1980 Act, a determination was made of the unfunded proportion of pre-1975 liabilities of each of the funds. The determinations were on a once-and-for-all basis. There is no provision for further determinations under the 1980 Act, regardless of whether the state of the funds' assets has changed. That was deliberate, so that British Rail would have an incentive to manage the funds effectively.

Why do we need to make these changes? As the 1980 Act stands, we have no powers to make periodic payments to other than a British Rail pension scheme, as defined under the Act, nor to make once-and-for-all payments to pay off the remaining liability to any scheme. We might want to do that, for example, where that liability to a scheme with a few and a diminishing number of members is very small. It makes sense to do that.

Another problem is that at present when a transfer value is paid to another scheme on an employee leaving British Rail, any unfunded proportion of the transfer payment is reimbursed immediately to the transferral scheme. I have a detailed brief, which I could read out, but it may be simpler if I tried to explain it in my own words. This is to meet the Public Accounts Committee's point.

If the existing scheme changed to the new arrangements under the joint industry scheme, technically speaking that would be a change. Therefore, the overall lump sum payment would have to be made at the moment, although underlying it there would be no change at all in the liabilities. That would certainly be criticised by the Public Accounts Committee. That is why we have made the changes.

It is to overcome these difficulties in the new arrangements that our proposed amendments will allow for varying the method and timing of payment to individual schemes, or in respect of different classes of member within a scheme. I do not need to weary the House, unless any hon. Member wishes to ask me questions, with precisely how that will be done. However, the fact is that that is all that the amendments seek to do.

The amendments would reverse the action that was taken by the Government in 1980 to respond to criticisms by the Public Accounts Committee about how the support payments were being made at the time, particularly in relation to the very small payments point. I can, however, reassure the House that the primary reason for amending the 1980 Act is to ensure that the bulk of the payments can continue to be made, whenever practicable, on the present pay-as-you-go basis.

[Mr. MacGregor]

I hope that the House will accept our amendments. I have already said why I am unable to accept the amendments and the new clause that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East wants. The most important point about the debate, and why I am glad that it is taking place so early on Report, is that it enables me to give the reassurances that pensioners and employees were seeking about their pensions and to emphasise that in the decisions that we have now announced we have met the vast majority of the representations made to us.

The pension trustees have acknowledged that we have approached this issue extremely fairly. I fully understand and completely sympathise with the concerns of pensioners about their pensions. I hope, therefore, that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will withdraw and not repeat the shameful allegations that he has made.

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I have to declare an interest, as I did in Committee. I am an ex-British Rail employee. I am also a deferred member of the British Rail pension scheme. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for telling me that I should now be reassured by what he has told me, but I must say to him early in the debate that he has not reassured me.

I was told that I could speak on my interest in the pension scheme, because it is not significant enough to prevent me from speaking and voting. However, my pension is significant to me. It will decide what happens to me in the future. It will be my security for the future. It is significant to me and to hundreds of thousands of others like me. It may be the deciding factor in whether I live in relative comfort in my old age or in poverty.

I do not take kindly to having to discuss my personal finances in front of the House of Commons and the country and I consider it to be in very bad taste that the Secretary of State has made me do so. I disagree even more with the fact that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Public Transport should feel that they can tinker with my pension without my express permission.

It is important to recognise to whom this pension belongs. It does not belong to the Government; it does not belong to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott); it does not belong to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan). It belongs to me and to the other pensioners. If that fact is recognised, all these matters are put into their proper context.

Over a year ago I thought—naively when I look back on it now—that my pension was safe. We had seen the tragedy of Maxwell and what could happen to pensions, but I knew that the trustees of the British Rail pension scheme had done a good job in the past. I had faith in them and had no worries about the future. I was even more reassured in July last year when the Government said in their White Paper:

"Privatisation will not affect pensions already being paid from or preserved in British Rail schemes."

I regard that as a guarantee and as a promise. It proved not to be a guarantee and, if it was a promise, that promise has not been kept.

I was not reassured for long. Before long I saw that the Government had two options. The Secretary of State still tries to portray those two options as a choice for pensioners and for deferred pensioners, like me. If they provide a choice, it is Hobson's choice. For me the choice is between whether I should be burgled or mugged. It means, in effect, that my pension is going to be tampered with and reduced by the Government, without my say-so under either option.

Under the second option, it is clear that the Government will take my money. However, under the first option

"an appropriate portion of each fund"

will

"be set aside as a closed scheme."

If an appropriate portion is to be set aside for a closed scheme, what will happen to the other portion? I hope that the Secretary of State will tell me what is to happen under the second option.

The first option means that the funds will be stripped and that there will be a change to a closed scheme. That scheme will die as the pensioners die. The scheme is terminal. It gives the Government the opportunity to evade and escape from the responsibilities that they had in the past. It provides no opportunity for shortfalls to be met by employee contributions.

The first option is unacceptable. The second option effectively allows the Government to take over all the assets of the pension fund. They promised me that my pension would rise in line with the retail prices index. But I already had that, and something else: I knew what my scheme was all about. I read the annual reports every year. It is no use Conservative Members shaking their heads. I know more about the British Rail pension scheme than any of them. I am a member of it.

The Government say that they will take all my assets and that in return my pension will rise in line with the RPI, but I already have over and above that in my present scheme. The trustees have looked after that scheme. Neither of the Government's options offers the same security or the same benefits as that scheme does.

Under the British Rail pension fund, pensions have increased by a third since 1984—not because of RPI increases, but through the use of surpluses. Widows' pensions have increased by even more—they now receive a half-payment rather than a third of a payment because of the surpluses created by good investment. The employer enjoyed a five-year contribution holiday thanks to surpluses in the fund. Other employees, but not me, had been enjoying a thirteen-and-a-half year half-payment contribution holiday which would not have ended until 2004, all because of the fund's surpluses. I was going to lose all those benefits under either of the Government's options.

5.30 pm

The fund is a living fund, and I use that word deliberately. It regenerates itself and keeps going because, as people die, new employees join, balance the fund and keep it balanced. For example, as at 31 March 1992, there were 295,478 people in the British Rail pension fund; 131,478 were contributing members; 40,000 were, like me, former members with preserved benefits; and 123,984 were beneficiaries. A balance was achieved between the new employees and people who were receiving benefits. The fund was stable not only in terms of numbers but financially. The accounts showed that the money coming in from employees was similar to that being paid to beneficiaries. The scheme worked and it was going to carry on working.

The figures for the same year show that 10,346 new members joined the scheme whereas 3,631 left. There were unfortunately 400 deaths in service and 4,022 retirements. The balance was set to continue and could have existed for ever if the Secretary of State had not interfered. He gives the impression that he is trying to be helpful to me and the pensioners, but I can only say, "Thanks but no thanks. I don't need it". I like the scheme as it is. I am happy and satisfied with it and I want to continue with the scheme that has given me such benefits.

The scheme provided me with as many guarantees as anyone can expect from any pension scheme or from anything else in life. There is no doubt that it worked well. Everyone agreed about that—the trustees, the Government, the unions, the pensioners and the contributors. If it ain't broke, why has the Secretary of State got to fix it?

I have heard people say that the Secretary of State and the Minister for Public Transport have made changes and granted concessions as they went along. They have, and sometimes very rapidly. I am sure that the hon. Member for Eastleigh has sometimes been as confused as I am by the rapidity with which the Government have changed their mind. They began by saying that the new scheme would be "comparable". I am not sure what tht means, but the phrase was changed and it was said that any new scheme would be "no less favourable". Whether it is comparable or no less favourable will be a decision not for me as a deferred pensioner, for other pensioners or for the trustees, but for the Secretary of State. He is the same Secretary of State who has already told me that options 1 and 2 are comparable with the scheme that I already have. It ain't true. This is the same Secretary of State who offered me options 1 and 2 after telling me initially that privatisation

"will not affect pensions already being paid from or preserved in British Rail schemes."

With respect, would I not be a little more naive than the hon. Member for Eastleigh if I were now to accept that my future and that of the other 200,000 people involved was to be left to the Secretary of State's interpretation of the phrases "comparable" and "no less favourable" when, only a few minutes ago, he was telling us that it was very difficult to describe what "precisely" meant? If he cannot tell us what "precisely" means in law, it will be very difficult for him to tell us what "comparable" and "no less favourable" mean in law. People have been caught by such phrases before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to previous BR privatisations when employees were told that their pensions would be mirror images of British Rail pensions. Were they mirror images? There was not a single scheme in which the contributors or pensioners did not lose out as a result of the change to the "mirror image" pension schemes. If I am wrong—I do not think that I am because it is a matter of record—or if the Secretary of State can tell me of one BR privatisation scheme which worked out better for pensioners and contributors, or one which worked out just as well, I should be very happy to hear about it. However, I have investigated them all and I could not find one.

I ask the Secretary of State what is wrong with continuing with a truly open scheme, not one that is open only at present? I noted that in Committee the Minister referred to the proposals as an open fund for the present, but the Secretary of State now refers to them as a closed fund in due course. It may be a question of semantics, but the delay is leading to a closed fund which, in the end, will be worse for me and for the present pensioners. The closed fund will be introduced not at my request or that of the trustees, but at that of the Secretary of State.

What is wrong with asking new employees to make a choice? What is wrong with asking them whether they want to contribute to a joint industry fund which is open to all, to take out a private pension or to join the pension scheme offered by the new operators? What is wrong with offering people that choice? Anyone with any sense will want to stay with the joint industry scheme which is open and is—I use the word again—a living scheme that will not disappear.

If the Secretary of State thinks that the delay is a sop or that it will persuade me that he is doing something for me, he is wrong. Pensions work on a long-term basis. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East because I do not think that the new scheme will be introduced in 1994. I believe that it will be introduced later, but does it matter if it is introduced in one, two or three years? Does it help me if it is introduced in five or 10 years? The answer is no. I shall not be drawing my pension for 20 years, but 20 years matter because by then the Secretary of State will have made his changes and will have made my pension a closed scheme. By virtue of its being a closed scheme, the trustees will not have the leeway to invest wisely to ensure that I receive proper benefits.

I refuse to be grateful for the Secretary of State's concessions because none of them is a proposal that in any way matches or even comes close to what I have now. At the moment, I have a pension scheme with which I feel safe and secure—a pension scheme which means that I can sleep at night without worrying that it will disappear. The Secretary of State seems to be proposing something that will not allow me to sleep at night and, more importantly, will not allow hundreds of thousands of other people to sleep at night. I have an edge on all those people because I have a House of Commons pension. What an outcry and what a Back-Bench revolt there would be if the proposals for the railway pension scheme applied to the House of Commons pension scheme. How would Conservative Members react then? If they feel passionately—as I hope they do—that people should be protected, they should put themselves in the position of those hundreds of thousands of railway employees.

Ms Jean Corston (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend share my concern about what will happen to the surplus in the pension fund? Little has been said about the surplus. As I understand it, in law the surplus in any pension fund is the property of the employer. In this case the surpluses——

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford) *indicated dissent.*

Ms Corston: Conservative Members shake their heads. I have had the point clarified in Committee on another matter. The surplus in the railway pension fund is owned by the Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need assurances from the Secretary of State that the Government do not intend to do anything with the surplus in the fund, other than to disburse it for employees and pensioners?

Mr. Heppell: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is a need for further reassurances. We get reassurances about the present, but not about the future. I do not wish deliberately to draw comparisons between Maxwell and what is happening now. However, although it may be legal for the Government to take my pension, I do not think that it is moral. In the Maxwell case, it was neither legal nor moral.

The problem is that, although I accept the assurances of the Secretary of State that I should not worry because the Government are not taking my pension now, I still have grave concerns and doubts about whether the Secretary of State plans to take my pension in the future. I am not willing to accept guarantees that are given to me in the form of words such as "comparable" or "no less favourable". I want something written into legislation that protects me now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East was quite right. We were told in Committee not to worry because something would be provided on Report to reassure us. We are now being told that there will be an order in the future to reassure us. It has already been stated that we shall be able to debate the order, but that we shall not be able to amend it. The Whips will be on. When that happens, there will be an hour and a half's debate and, although the hon. Member for Eastleigh may be outraged by the Government's betrayal, the vote will go through. We all know how things work in Parliament. I am not prepared to be grateful for any concession. Why should I be grateful for someone throwing me crumbs when they have stolen my loaf? Someone is stealing something that belongs to me; it may be legal, but it is not moral.

How will the two-tier system created by the Secretary of State affect the work force? All new employees will be expected to take a new and, I suspect, substandard, second-rate pension scheme instead of the one currently on offer. In future, people will be worse off and I want to fight that. I want not only to look after myself and the present pensioners, but to ensure that the people who come after us will have a decent pension scheme. People have the right to expect a decent pension scheme. Why should we have legislation that worsens the scheme?

What about the existing employees? We shall create two types of employees: the employees who have low pension costs and those who have high pension costs. The House should mark my words. It will not be long before the private operators and the unscrupulous realise that it is cheaper to employ people on the new pension schemes. People who presently work for the railways will be shed because they will be more expensive. That will happen, just as full-time jobs are being lost across the country to make way for part-time jobs in which the beneifts are not so good for the employees, but in which the costs to the employers are less. By fair means or foul, new employers will recognise the savings and will make the changes.

5.45 pm

We asked for guarantees on a number of issues in Committee. The Minister said many times that he could not give guarantees that would apply for ever and that nothing was certain in life. I accept that on many issues; I accept that there will be change, whether we like it or not. Changes are often for the good, so we should not resist just for the sake of resisting change. However, there is one matter about which people—I am certainly one of them—expect to have some certainty: their pensions. They expect to have guarantees about their pensions and they expect to have some guarantees about their future. They are not prepared to leave their pension to chance and they are not prepared to gamble with it. Yet that is what the Secretary of State wants me to do now. He wants me to gamble with my pension, but I am not prepared to see my pension go without protest. I know that there are hundreds of thousands of people who feel the same and they will continue to protest if the Government push the proposal through.

Mr. Milligan *indicated assent.*

Mr. Heppell: The hon. Member for Eastleigh nods; he knows some of the pensioners and he knows how strongly they feel on the issue.

This debate is not just about my pension, nor is it just about railwaymen's pensions. It is about everyone's pension. It is about miners' pensions, about the Post Office pensions and about all the public sector pensions. It is also about the state pension. Let us not——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The debate cannot be about state pensions. It must be about the new clause.

Mr. Heppell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that I was straying from the point.

The new clause makes it clear that there is a need for consultation with the trustees. I wish that the Government would consult people more widely on every issue. The Government are in economic crisis. Part of the reason for the changes in pension plans is that the Government would like to take some money out of the pension fund. Members of the other place have told us that state pensions are under threat. That is not something to be laughed at or scoffed at. As a result of the pressures on the Government, there are all sorts of strange decisions. There is the threat of prescription charges for the old and the young. There is the threat of the closure of post offices and pharmacies.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): That is not true. Post offices are not under threat—not that we are discussing them at the moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's speech has been entirely in order, but he is now straying. Would he please return to the new clause and to the new clauses and amendments associated with it?

Mr. Heppell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will return to the new clause. I was trying to point out that everything was up for grabs and that people accepted that fact. Pensions are one of the things that are up for grabs. I believe that there is a threat to state pensions as well as to occupational pensions.

I realise that I am trying your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, I cannot accept the Secretary of State's promises. We have heard those promises before and we have seen them broken. I believe that the promises on pensions in respect of the new clauses will be the new broken promises of this Government. I hope that hon. Members will support new clauses 3 and 29 and I hope that they will do all that they can to ensure that the pensions belong to the pensioners and not to the Government.

Dr. Marek: I spent no longer than 30 seconds moving new clause 3 and that produced a most surprising result from the Secretary of State. After 10 years in Parliament,

I did not expect him to say that he accepted the spirit of my new clause and that he would table amendments in another place. I thank the Secretary of State for that. That is a small but welcome step and I believe that it will be appreciated by every railway pensioner.

I speak as a sponsored member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. However, unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell), I do not have a railway pension. I appreciate my hon. Friend's feelings when he said that he felt happy with his pension at the moment, but he was worried about the future. He is worried about the Government getting their sticky fingers on his pension fund. That is the root of the problem. If the Government are able to get their sticky fingers on the railway industry's pension fund, they may be encouraged by their success and try to get their sticky fingers on pension funds elsewhere.

Having gained success by being brief earlier, I suppose that I must not be other than brief now. I agree with the Secretary of State that the provisions in new clause 3 would have been better in schedule 10. However, in line with the procedures of this place, I thought that it was right to table the new clause in the first instance.

I obviously failed in my drafting when I included the words "Board pension scheme." Perhaps I should have spotted that, but all is not lost. I included "precisely" in the new clause intentionally. It is perhaps a comment on our law, and the way in which lawyers earn their money, that we cannot include "precisely." Life being as it is, it is likely that "precisely" will have to be dropped from the eventual wording. However, I hope that the Secretary of State can find a form of words that will be as close to "precisely" without encouraging lawyers to make a lot of extra money by challenging a particular decision in the courts.

I want to refer to the representations and responses of the British Railways Board. A BRB response to "Railway Pensions After Privatisation," under a paragraph entitled "Safeguards in the Railways Bill," states:

"The Board considers that, for the further protection of the security of members' interests, the Railways Bill should include the following provisions:

1. Any regulations under the Act must not enable any decision about the use of funds to be made other than with the agreement of the Trustees."

Hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will recall that I tabled an amendment to that effect which did not find favour with the Committee. However, it is a central issue in this debate. The Secretary of State should be able to make changes with regard to the use of funds only with the consent of the trustees.

In the response to which I have referred, BRB makes two other points:

"2. Any Joint Industry scheme should offer benefits no less favourable than the present schemes.

3. Transfer payments should reflect a fair division, as agreed by independent actuaries, of the existing funds between beneficiaries."

I recently received a briefing note from British Rail that amplified those points. It stated that BR staff should be able

"to remain permanently in the proposed joint industry scheme, if they wish".

It stated that existing BR schemes should

"remain open for BR staff and pensioners as long as feasible."

It also stated that

"the agreement of their trustees"—

must—

"be required to changes to those schemes."

The Government have gone some way down that road in relation to the Secretary of State's written answer which gives commitments. I hope that those commitments are genuine, in the spirit that there should be a guarantee for BR staff to remain permanently in a proposed joint industry scheme and that any future benefits should not be less favourable. If that is the case, we have moved a little. However, it is a great pity that we have not been able to get the Government to accept that no changes should be made without the agreement of the trustees. Unless the Government can accept that, I am extremely worried about what the Government will do.

The Secretary of State for Transport is being honest and I believe him. However, he is not master in his own house with regard to the sum total of Government finances. The Treasury may well have different priorities and it may wish to change the uses to which some of the money can be put in years to come.

We have moved some way in that option 2 has been withdrawn and we have moved to option 1, although that is imperfect. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East put it very well, if it is a good scheme, why change it? There is no obvious reason why we are changing it, save, perhaps, for the position of new entrants.

I am sure that new entrants will not be able to join such a scheme. They will not be able to benefit from improvements to such a scheme or have the lifestyle that existing pensioners will have as a result of their participation in the present scheme. This debate is about the impoverishment of the people of this country. People will be poorer as a result of the changes that the Government have announced.

I believe that new clause 3 is valuable because it will clarify what the Government are doing. I hope that the Government will accept my new clause because if Transport Ministers want to do the best for the pensioners, they should be happy to demonstrate publicly and to the House that any changes will not adversely affect pensioners. I doubt whether that will be the case when the Treasury gets going on this matter in years to come. However, I will be charitable to the Secretary of State for Transport and say that I believe that that is what he hopes to do.

As to new entrants, we need simply consider what happened in earlier privatisations. Without exception, all the pension schemes in the National Freight Corporation. Sealink, British Rail Engineering Ltd. and Travellers Fare Ltd. now offer inferior benefits. Despite reductions in the membership contributing to large scheme surpluses, the National Freight Corporation, Sealink and BREL have all enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, a pensions contribution holiday. Unfortunately, the schemes' members have not been treated as generously. In addition, the National Freight Corporation and Travellers Fare Ltd. have established new schemes offering inferior benefits which, at the same time, provide the companies with greater control of scheme assets than did the initial schemes established on privatisation. We will have to examine the results of the Goode report, but if the history of privatisation is anything to go by, the more security we can establish, and the more we can tie the Government down in the operation of the new scheme in respect of any changes that will be introduced, the better. I am convinced that as a result of the measure that we are debating today, new entrants will be impoverished in their pensionable years.

[Dr. Marek]

I thank the Government for accepting the spirit of new clause 3. I look forward to the amendments being tabled in another place. Every British Rail pensioner will be happy that the Government have accepted the change suggested in new clause 3. They will know what changes will be made. Most important, they will know when the Government propose to do something other than what the trustees would wish. I only wish that the Government were prepared not to make any changes except with the agreement of the trustees. This is the next best thing. In view of what the Secretary of State for Transport said earlier, I certainly shall not press the new clause to a Division.

6 pm

Mr. Milligan: I should like to reply to some of the points that the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) raised in a passionate, sincere and deeply felt speech which I am sure that the House respected. I hope that I can say a few things that will enable him and 200,000 other pensioners to sleep well at night. Before I do so, I wish to add a few words to the tributes paid by both Front-Bench spokesmen to the late Robert Adley.

As a new Member, I particularly appreciated Robert Adley's generosity and kindness. He showed it to me in a particular way when I had an Adjournment debate on the future of the rail maintenance works in my constituency in which he had hoped to speak. Shortly before the debate, he came to me and said that he would withdraw his name because he realised that as a critic of the Government his support might be counterproductive.

It was typical of Robert Adley's generosity that he put other people and, indeed, the railways before his self-interest. I remember him as not only a critic of the Government on rail privatisation but a strong supporter of the Government on the Maastricht treaty. He was a positive European and a strong European. He argued convincingly in the House for the European cause. We shall miss him greatly.

As hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will know, the pensions issue is of great concern in my constituency, where there are almost 2,000 railway pensioners. As other hon. Members have said, the issues give rise to wider concern. People on railway pensions receive a modest pension—typically, £40 a week. That is not a large sum. As the hon. Member for Nottingham, East made clear, such people usually have not earned a great deal of money in their lifetime, but they have done extremely well out of a pension scheme which has been well run and well managed. In the past six or seven years, for a typical person, the amount has risen by a third above inflation.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East asked how Members of Parliament would feel if we were discussing changes to the House of Commons pension scheme. The British Rail pension scheme has probably done rather better than the House of Commons pension scheme. We would all be rather well off if our pensions were run by the British Rail pension board.

Mr. Heppell: The average pension of a pensioner in the British Rail pension scheme is about £30, so there is a difference between the schemes in the amounts that individuals receive.

Mr. Milligan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. But he will agree that the percentage increase has been impressive.

The issue that we are discussing this afternoon is not whether but how pensioners should be protected from any adverse effects of privatisation. From the outset, the Government have made it clear that railway pensioners will receive no less favourable treatment than they would have done if the scheme had continued in the same way.

Opposition Members have asked why the existing scheme cannot continue. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport explained at great length why, for tax reasons and because of Inland Revenue rules, that was not possible. He also made it clear that he was determined to ensure that pensioners were protected. The Government have been criticised for changing their policy. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has made some capital out of such criticism. It is characteristic of the discussions on the Bill that the Government have listened. They have consulted. They listened to the trade unions and accepted the unions' view that a joint industry scheme would be good.

The Government listened to the trustees. They listened to British Rail. Only today they listened to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accepted the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's new clause. Even more remarkably, the Government have listened to Conservative Back Benchers. The Government should not be criticised for taking account of the objections that have been made. They should be congratulated on having widely consulted, listened and taken account of what people have said.

The Government have taken account in particular of what the pensioners have said. As the House knows, the Government originally provided two options. Under one option, which was much criticised, the money would have been transferred to the Treasury. Pensioners would have had an inflation guarantee. There were some attractions to that option because, contrary to what is widely said, the present scheme is not index linked.

However, the pensioners, certainly in my constituency, made it clear that they did not want that option. They preferred to have a scheme as close as possible to the existing scheme. That is why I suggested in Committee what I knew was the view of the trustees. I asked whether it would not be better to put pensioners, existing employees and those who remain with British Rail in the same scheme. That would get around one of the problems of the Government's original plan.

As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East made clear, a closed scheme including pensioners only would have to invest more in gilt-edged stock because the scheme would not have a continuing flow of contributions from people who were still working in the industry. The suggestion was that the two should be combined in a transitional scheme. That is exactly what the Government have announced. Having talked to pension trustees last week and this week, I know that they are delighted with that announcement. It goes a long way towards meeting the concerns that have been expressed.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East asked how "no less favourable treatment" could be defined precisely. That is difficult to do. We are not asking for a guarantee that railway pensioners will receive the same increases that they have received in the past seven or eight years. That is not possible. We do not know what the performance of the

underlying investments will be. However, we want a guarantee that they will have the same prospects and opportunity of benefiting from efficient management of the pension fund. The scheme that has been announced today gives them that guarantee, and it is encouraging that the trustees have welcomed it.

On behalf of the trustees, I should like to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to emphasise that the guarantee of "no less favourable treatment" will continue to apply even when the scheme becomes a closed scheme, if that is the case. That is important.

I congratulate the Government on accepting the changes. The changes have satisfied the trustees and pensioners will recognise that the Government have met their concerns. I understand why the Opposition have attacked and criticised the Government. That is their job. They do not always do it effectively, but sometimes they do. However, they must accept yes for an answer. The Government have accepted the points that they have made. To continue to make capital from the now rejected scheme of transfer to the Treasury by using words such as robbery, theft, burglary and mugging goes beyond the bounds of decent argument. The Opposition are trying to exploit the concerns of people who are vulnerable. They have failed to recognise the Government's announcement. That is disgusting, and I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will have the grace and decency to withdraw his allegations at the end of the debate. The Government have my full support.

Ms Glenda Jackson: In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell), I wish to declare an interest, in that I am sponsored by a rail union, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen.

The concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) were also expressed in the petition that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East presented to the House on Friday morning. The thousands upon thousands of signatures of British Rail pensioners were not created by the Opposition. They were the genuine and still real concerns of BR pensioners. The accusation that the Government were attempting to steal from the BR pension fund began, if memory serves me correctly, in economic newspapers. People may not have gone all the way and called it theft, but there were reports that the Government were attempting to get their hands on the BR pension fund. The newspapers raised the issue that if the Government got away with the BR pension fund, they would then attack the coal fund and the Post Office fund. The Opposition are always accused of scaremongering—*[Interruption]*. "Hear, hear," say Conservative Members. Nine times out of 10, those scares come well and truly home to roost.

How can any pensioner have real trust in a Government who have suggested, in the European Year of the Elderly, that pensioners may have to pay prescription charges? The Government promise to impose VAT on fuel, which, as we all know, affects pensioners deleteriously.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must have heard what I said to the hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell). She must address her remarks to the new clause and the amendments grouped with it, and not be tempted to range more widely.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was taught always to give in to temptation, but I shall restrain myself on this occasion.

Changes have already been made to the Government's proposals for a pension scheme. To my certain knowledge, they have taken three bites at the cherry, and have cracked their molars every time. They have had to come back with an alternative scheme; but that scheme has not stemmed the fears of British Rail pensioners—or, indeed, those of current employees. The idea that all employees will be allowed to enter the joint industry scheme is welcome, but why is there not the concomitant that all new employers must also participate in the scheme? As was pointed out in Committee, it is entirely possible that a new franchisee, or an open-access employer, will find it economically unviable. We will be creating a two-tier system.

Mr. Milligan: The hon. Lady seems to misunderstand the joint industry scheme. Employers will be obliged to take part in it.

Ms Jackson: I am not surprised to learn that I lack understanding in that regard. I understood very clearly when my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East described the pension scheme as it now exists; I am sure that the Secretary of State will take that as a valuable lesson when he wishes to define the Government's scheme in more detail.

My understanding is that new employers will not be forced, or obliged, to enter the scheme if they can offer their employees what they call a better scheme. But, as we have heard, the current employees do not want any change in the existing pension scheme. If such a change is to be made, they want a fail-safe guarantee that no alterations may be introduced without the full and tacit agreement of the trustees. Surely every hon. Member should want to guarantee that safeguard for BR pensioners.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East pointed out, the actual pensions are extremely small. Employees of British Rail, as it still is, have given more than financial contributions to the scheme. As was said in Committee—I must emphasise this—this is a high-risk industry, not for the travelling public, but certainly for those employed on the railways. There has been a marked increase in the number of injuries and, in some instances, deaths. We are being asked, in a sense, to penalise people who have not only given their work and their money to the pension scheme, but—in a number of cases—given their lives to the industry.

The complexities and difficulties that the Government are experiencing are entirely their own fault. It was the Government who decided to privatise British Rail, not the BR board or the employees. The Government's problems are entirely of their own making. Surely it is up to the Government to listen to those who know best the realities of the industry, and the realities of having to live on small pensions.

In a letter dated 19 May, Mr. R. S. Green, chairman of the Southend and district branch of the British Transport Pensioners Federation, wrote:

"Mr. MacGregor offers us nothing we do not already have —but he is taking something away . . . Mr. Freeman repeats that BR's pension fund will only be used to provide for pensions. I believe him. But this is not the same as saying that we will get our full and fair share. By limiting payment under Option 2 to the *already existing* 'pension plus RPI' level he is simply providing more for others (which could include

[Ms Jackson]

Franchisees). By removing the chance for us to share in any possible future surplus he robs us of the hope of a better future and alienates pensioners."

Earlier in his letter, Mr. Green wrote:

"Just this past week you will have read that the BT pension fund has been revalued and shows a large downturn in income. Their entire surplus has been wiped out and the employer's 'contributions holiday' has been terminated. They are now resuming payments into their fund . . . If a huge fund with a surplus can be reduced to deficit in a year what hope would there be for a fund deprived of both employer and employee contributions? But this"——

so a BR pensioner believes——

"is the essence of the Government's proposal."

We have all made our points to the Government, both today and in Committee. The Minister has said that the Government are willing to listen. I urge him to continue to listen and to give pensioners the necessary safeguard—certainly in regard to the trustees' decision—if any change in pension schemes is considered. We owe it not only to BR pensioners and employees, but to the millions of citizens who—as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East said earlier—are concerned about their pensions, whether or not they are connected with BR. I believe that that should be part and parcel of decisions made in the House. Not only should the fine detail of Government proposals be examined, but an attempt should be made, as far as is humanly possible, to give a wider perspective to issues about which the public are genuinely concerned—issues that relate to their future.

6.15 pm

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): Let me take up what the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms. Jackson) has just said. It is clear that the Government have indeed been listening.

I welcome this afternoon's statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It is evident that consultation has been wide and effective, taking on board points as wide-ranging as those raised by the Cicero of Eastleigh and the McGonagall of Wrexham. I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend for taking up the points that I have raised on behalf of the Chester branch of the British Transport Pensioners Federation. Its concern was, first and foremost, to ensure the preservation of the security of rights enjoyed by pensioners.

The federation will welcome the joint industry pension scheme, the fact that existing employees' rights will be protected by statutory orders and the fact that the benefits offered to employees will be no less favourable than those in the existing scheme. They will welcome the fact that there will be no penalties for involuntary breaks in employment—that the present scheme, under which the employer matches additional voluntary contributions made by employees, will continue; in short, that there will be no mucking about with BRASS.

The federation will particularly welcome the written reply in which, on Thursday, the Secretary of State went further, and gave staff serving at the time of Royal Assent the individual right to remain in the joint industry scheme for as long as they were employed in the railway industry. As has been explained, the amendment to the Bill that will secure what I believe is termed an indefeasible right will be presented in another place. In particular, the federation will welcome the specific safeguards in franchise contracts to cover the transfer of pension funds when a franchise changes hands.

Mr. Bill Newman and his colleagues in the Chester branch of the federation—to whom I have spoken again today—are reasonable people. They are looking for helpful reason, rather alarmist rhetoric; yet they have been alarmed by unnecessary scaremongering, which has gone on for weeks and has been perpetuated today by a positive Niagara of words from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—a Niagara thick with the flotsam and jetsam of scare, smear and half-truth. What they wanted, and what they received, was the cool stream of reason and the solid, tangible reassurance provided by the Secretary of State.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): It is significant that we have had clarification of the Government's intentions for pensions so late in the day. It reflects an underlying attitude that has been clear ever since the privatisation proposals were first introduced—that the least of the Government's concerns has been the welfare of those who ensure that the railway system operates. I know that it is sometimes unfashionable—even, for Conservative Members, an insult—to talk about producer interests. I believe that those who provide our railway services, and those who have done so in the past, deserve to be given as high a priority as any other group. The lack of that consideration explains why the pension proposals have been introduced so late. It also explains why we are still being asked to rely on promises rather than written guarantees.

Throughout the debate of recent months pensioners have been treated as a problem, not as people to be respected for their contribution. It has not been said often enough by Conservative Members that the reason for the problem with past and future pensioners is privatisation itself. Everything that we hear from the Government starts with the assumption that the railways will be privatised, then the problems caused for pensioners will be considered. There would be no problem about the future of the pensions of those who work in the railway system and have given their lives to it were it not for the Government's intention to privatise it. That is the gulf that divides the two sides of the House on so many occasions. The Government ask us to assume that privatisation is a good thing, so the House should concentrate on dealing with the problems for pensioners that will follow from it. The Opposition are inclined to say that there would be no problem if the Government had not started on the madcap policy.

Privatisation brings two problems for pensioners. The first is the interpretation of the Inland Revenue rules, and how the contributions of non-associated employees should be handled. I am not convinced that the Government could not have found a way round that problem had they the political will to do so. It has been convenient for the Government to hide behind the Inland Revenue rules to push forward with their wider objectives.

The second problem caused by the proposed privatisation is the unwillingness to require employers in the private sector railway system to bring their new employees into a pension scheme on the same basis as existing employees have been brought into the Government scheme. It is, above all, the determination to lower employer costs for new employees of the railway

system that lies behind the rest of the problems, threats and uncertainties that hang over existing British Rail pensioners and those who will become pensioners in the next few years. That is wrong—it is wrong to try to provide this country's railway system on the basis of driving down the conditions of those who will provide railway services in future.

In Committee I described the Government's preoccupations as ideological dogma. The Minister for Public Transport said that it was not ideological dogma, but a statement of principle. We can choose the words that we want to use to describe that attitude, but it comes down to one of political belief rather than a rational approach to running the railway system.

Without privatisation there would be no such problems. Have the Government done what they are now trying to say that they have done for pensioners? Have they found a way of securely cutting through the problems caused by privatisation to guarantee the pension rights of current and future pensioners? I have to say to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan)—who has taken much time and trouble over the matter—that I do not believe that the answer to that question is yes.

If we compare the rights currently available to British Rail pensioners and employees with those that will exist in future we see a number of critical weaknesses that the Government's proposals do not overcome. The pensioners have clearly had a number of concerns. Their bottom line concern involves the security of their assets—the fear of somebody "doing a Maxwell". The Government fuelled that fear themselves by their infamous option 2 proposal to nick the money and stick it in the Treasury. There is nobody but the Government to blame for the fears that pensioners expressed about that option. We are told that that option has now been rejected, although I have not heard the absolute assurance that it has been rejected for the future which many of us would like to have heard. The idea of taking money in the short term appears to have come off the agenda.

Pensioners have expressed a second worry. They want to be able to compare what they will receive under the Government's proposals with what they currently receive under an industry-wide scheme, in which all those who provide rail services share and in which the costs and future risks are shared between the current pensioners, current employees and future pensioners. When one compares what pensioners receive at present with what the Government propose for the future, one highlights the reason why the Government have not managed to tackle the problem properly.

Once a fund becomes closed, it has to adopt a more conservative investment strategy. It will not be possible for pensioners in a closed fund to enjoy the sort of returns on assets that the British Rail pension fund has previously produced. The original proposal was to close the fund immediately; the current proosal is to close the fund in a few years' time. The fundamental proposal to close the fund has not varied.

We hope that all current British Rail pensioners and those who become pensioners in the next year or so will wish to draw their pensions for much longer than the five or six years that the fund may remain open. I hope that many of them will draw their pensions for 20, 30 years or more. For most of the period that those pensioners draw their pensions they will be drawing on the assets of a closed, not open, fund. The fund will not benefit from an inflow of money from new contributors.

As I understand it, it is likely that all the funds will be managed as one pool by the British Rail pension fund, but the different claims on that fund will buy into or be allocated certain parts of it. A central pool of funds will purchase equities, gilts or property. However, assets will be apportioned differently depending on whether someone belongs to the closed fund of pensioners or to the relatively active fund of a new employer. The pensioners in the closed fund will receive the most conservative portion of the assets.

In practice, that means that someone who is now retired will find that, within a few years, he or she will be in a closed fund that pursues a conservative investment strategy and gives a conservative rate of return. A member of British Rail staff who transfers to a franchise organisation in the next year or so will be in a different part of the fund which has very few pensioners. Someone of 63 or 64 who transfers to a new franchise will be one of the first pensioners in that part of the fund, whereas a person who is now 66 and retired will be one of the last pensioners to join the closed fund.

On the advice that I have been given, my understanding is that the performance of those two funds will be different. An employee who is two years older than another employee in another part of the railway system will receive a different return on his or her pension. A British Rail pensioner will receive a lower rate of return in future than someone in a more advantageous part of the system.

Therefore, the Government's scheme fails for two clear reasons. The first reason is that the scheme that is now being proposed is less favourable than the current scheme because it forces the closure of the fund in the foreseeable future. The second reason is that that fund is likely to prove less favourable than the fund used by other people working within the railway system. In both cases pensioners will say that they are worse off than they would have been had the system remained unchanged. They are even likely to say that they will be worse off than someone who retired only a couple of years before them because of the way that the scheme is structured.

6.30 pm

The third reason relates to security. It is possible that the closed fund could be worse even than index linking, which was in option 2. Everyone accepts that there is no guarantee even of index linking in the current pension system. Pensioners rejected the index-linking option because they perceived it as likely to be worse than what they get under the current British Rail system. It is still a fear of the pension fund trustees that it is possible that, once the fund is closed, it may not only work less favourably than other parts of the railway system; it might not be able to meet the demand of index linking. As far as I can tell, the Government have given no guarantee that even that basic index linking would be met under this option. They will say that they have given pensioners the choice by going out and consulting. However, the pensioners did not like option 2.

The Government have increased the risks to pensioners of staying in an investment fund by the way in which they have chosen to do it. They have told pensioners that they can have a fund that may give them a return on their assets but the risk is much higher. It is unacceptable to give

pensioners the choice of maintaining the rate of return that they have seen recently, perhaps losing it altogether, or accepting the index linked Treasury option.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh said that he wanted the Minister to give a guarantee that, if the fund is unable to meet at least index linking, it will in some way be topped up by the Government. The Government should also give a guarantee that, if the closed fund performs less satisfactorily than other parts of the British Rail pension fund, they will bring its performance up to that of the more favourable parts of the fund. After all, it is the Government's action of pursuing privatisation that has created the risk of either of those two things not happening.

The only way in which they can give a guarantee to pensioners is to make it clear that they will top up the closed fund if its performance does not come up to that of the more favourable parts of the fund. I hope that the Minister will give that assurance. If not, I hope that not only Labour Members but the hon. Member for Eastleigh, who has made great play of protecting the interests of pensioners, will not vote with the Government on this crucial clause.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): At the outset, I remind the House that I am sponsored by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. In my brief time as a Member of Parliament, I have had a larger postbag on rail privatisation than on any other issue. Since the Bill was published, I have received more than 400 letters from my constituents.

Not one of those letters supported the Government's proposals for privatisation, despite the fact that a number of those who wrote described themselves as lifelong Tory voters. The vast majority of the 400 letters came from rail pensioners living in my constituency, expressing their disbelief and outrage at the Government's proposals for the pension fund.

The Secretary of State accused my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) of scaremongering. But that statement of the Secretary of State will simply be met by stunned disbelief by the rail pensioners in my constituency and elsewhere. He is looking for a scapegoat—he is prepared to blame anyone but himself. I remind him of what he said in the House in January during the debate on rail privatisation. About the pension fund, he said:

"we propose one of two options. The first is that an appropriate part of the existing fund should be set aside and administered separately for the pensioners . . . Alternatively, part of a fund could be taken over by the Government who would undertake to pay index-linked pensions."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1993; Vol. 216, c. 795.]

Mr. MacGregor: As I made clear earlier, if we had gone for that option, if that was what the people had wanted, it was accepted by the pension trustees that, if the Government were making commitments to liabilities of that sort, it was reasonable that a part of the total assets should be handed to the Government in response to giving those liabilities.

All the liabilities related to pensions, and would have been independently and actuarily calculated. We could not give an absolutely clear actuarial commitment, given that there was an open-ended Government guarantee, but it would have been as near as one could get. It would have been absolutely fair, and done entirely for pension reasons.

Mr. Bayley: It was in the plans, but the Government were blown off course—they had to drop the idea.

Mr. MacGregor: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, if that option had been chosen, the Government should then be responsible for paying all pensions and giving a guaranteed index-linked pension, but should not have any assets to pay those pensions, so the assets in the pension fund should have remained in toto for the benefit of existing employees? If that is what he is saying, the Public Accounts Committee would have made a devastating comment on that proposal.

Mr. Bayley: The Secretary of State knows perfectly well that that is not what I am saying. Labour Members have never argued for that option, but the Government have. If pensioners were scared—indeed, they have been scared by the Government's proposals—it was the words of the Secretary of State that scared them, not the words of Labour Members.

To make it absolutely clear to my constituents what the Government were proposing, I lodged in every public library in my constituency a copy of the White Paper, and a copy of each of the Department of Transport consultation documents, including the one on pensions, and a copy of the Bill. My constituents were able to read what the Government proposed and draw their own conclusions. I wish that all Conservative Members in railway constituencies had been as open and free with information to their constituents as I was with mine. Perhaps they would have received 400 letters if they had done the same.

Pensioners were scared by what they heard from the Government. It was not Labour Members who were—as the Secretary of State looks at it—whipping up fear among pensioners. An article in the *Financial Times* on 15 March said:

"The result"

of the Government's proposals for rail pensioners

"is that a chastened government is preparing to beat a rapid retreat in the face of pensioner power."

The Government's proposals created the reaction from pensioners.

The article goes on:

"The second option would, in effect, involve the nationalisation of the pensioners' money . . . the government would be taking on a commitment to pay pensions in exchange for acquiring the scheme's assets, the Treasury would then have to dispose of £8·5 billion of mainly equity-type investments. This would be helpful in funding a soaring public-sector borrowing requirement since it would take pressure off the gilt market."

Those are not the words of Labour Members—they are the independent words of a journalist writing in the *Financial Times*.

It is a cheek for the Government to accuse the Labour party of scaremongering when they have only themselves to blame. Because of the pensioners' protests, they were forced to withdraw option 2—the "nationalisation of pensioners' money" option, to use the words of the *Financial Times*.

What about option 1? Mr. Robertson, the chairman of the British Rail pension scheme, wrote in a letter to the Standing Committee examining the Bill that option 1 "undermines the pensioners' security". I recognise that the Government have been forced to not only withdraw option 2 but make a number of significant amendments to option 1. For example, in their consultation paper, the

Government considered tearing up the agreements that they had made under the terms of the 1980 Act, but those have been reinstated.

The BRASS obligations have been confirmed, and the Government have been forced part of the way down the road to a single, industrywide pension fund. They have agreed to what they call an industrywide fund that will consist of existing pensioners, former employees of BR who remain within the rail industry and continuing BR employees.

I suspect that there will be much dispute over the definition of a former employee who remains in the rail industry. Some employees will transfer from BR to a private company operating a rail franchise. There will be no doubt that such people still work in the rail industry, and, under the Government's proposal, if they were former BR employees, they will take with them their pension rights.

Many people in my constituency work as professional engineers designing signalling systems and permanent way installations and designing and repairing bridges. Under the Government's privatisation proposals, many of those people could transfer to firms of consulting, civil, electrical, or mechanical engineers.

Those firms would certainly be working on some railway projects: that is why they raided British Rail for the required skills. However, they would also work on other civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering projects. Would those people still be regarded as working in the rail industry, and would the guarantee that they would retain their pensions under the BR fund still apply? I hope that the Secretary of State or the Minister will answer those questions.

The scheme offered in the modified option 1 is still a long way from the "comparable scheme" that the Secretary of State promised in the White Paper. In due course, it will become a closed scheme, with all that that implies for a more cautious investment strategy that is less likely to generate the surpluses from which pensioners have benefited in the past. It will deny future rail employees who are not currently BR employees the choice to join the main railway industry pension scheme. That will be brought about by a Government who say that they believe in choice and want to extend it. If the Government's proposal is accepted an Act of Parliament will deny choice.

When the scheme becomes a closed one, it will wither and die. What the Minister for Public Transport described to the Committee as the best-managed pension scheme in the country will be snuffed out over time. Perhaps that will be because the Government do not like to see a public pension scheme offering the sort of competition that private schemes cannot match. The Government are determined to peck away at the public sector pension scheme until private schemes can get a look in.

The Government's proposal will drive a wedge between former BR employees working for private railway companies and people taken on by the private companies who did not formerly work for BR. The private sector employee will be able to play one employee off against another. He will say, "I will offer you promotion only if you drop your pension rights, because your rights in the British Rail scheme are more costly than those of other employees." Former BR employees could price themselves out of promotion and, ultimately, out of a job. That is no way to bring in a new age of railways, which is what the Government pretend privatisation will do.

An industrywide scheme that encompassed everybody in the industry now and in the future would bring benefits. Privatisation means that railway men and women, instead of working for BR throughout their working lives, will work for a number of employers, as franchisees come and go and as the management of routes, lines, functions or support services moves from one company to another.

It is a great boon not just to employees but to employers to be able to spend one's working life of service to the railways under a single scheme by which one can accrue benefits in the sure knowledge that on retirement the full 40 years of service would be reflected in a decent and secure pension. That would create the sort of stability that privatisation intends to disrupt. Only a little foresight, imagination and common sense by the Government would enable them to introduce such a scheme, but the Bill shows that foresight, imagination and common sense are qualities that the Government do not have.

6.45 pm

Mr. Prescott: The debate has shown that considerable uncertainty exists about the Government's proposals. Hon. Members have tried to find the basis for that and to determine whether we can now trust the Secretary of State. All hon. Members are agreed that the debate is about the concern of pensioners.

The Government have made changes to the proposed legislation, some of which are considerable advances on the proposals contained in the document about changes to the pension funds. In that document, the Government said that they intended to listen. Pressure has contributed to the changes, but I doubt whether we can accept further Government promises.

I shall correct one or two points made by the Secretary of State about the options. He spoke about the 1980 Act and criticism by the Public Accounts Committee. The report by that Committee showed the public sector borrowing requirement liabilities that would accrue to the Treasury from an unfunded scheme. In its management of public funds, the Treasury is rightly concerned about the public sector borrowing requirement. Such liabilities may arise in future, and that leads one to conclude that the assets in the pension funds would be of short-term assistance to the Treasury in reducing the PSBR. In that context, option 2 would have been useful for the Government.

In Committee, there were eight or nine changes to the legislation and one or two more were announced on Thursday by the Secretary of State . . . Those changes are the result of discussions and pressures. The Secretary of State conceded to my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley) that one of the intentions of option 2 was to take the fund assets. The Secretary of State is right to say that, if the Treasury had done that, it would have been criticised by the Public Accounts Committee.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for York is certainly a sound one. The particular attraction of option 2 is that the Treasury would get a considerable amount of money—we estimate about £4 billion—and it is that proportion that would have been allocated, under such circumstances, to the current 220,000 pensioners. It

[Mr. Prescott]

was clearly the Government's intention to consider that option as one of the possibilities, and it was right for us to draw attention to that.

At the first public meeting on this issue, in Chester, I pointed out that that was an option that the Government had in mind. That led to a tremendous reaction and brought into the political debate what I have identified as option 3—which we tabled as an amendment in Committee. Many thousands of pensioners agreed with that option. We made it clear that any consultation process should include option 3 rather than be limited to options 1 and 2.

We called on railway pensioners to sign in favour of option 3—including my father, who lives in Chester, and is one of the fund's pensioners. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] If that is a declared interest, I am proud to say that I have a father who was a railwayman and is a recipient under the pension fund. That is not a declared personal interest—but it has made me aware of the concern felt by pensioners.

A number of hon. Members—including my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell)—made it clear on Friday that they wanted an industrywide scheme—and that is what has eventually been achieved. They wanted it to be available to all employees, and that, too, has been established. They wanted that scheme to be available to the British Transport police fund, under a continuation of the closed fund, and that, too, has been established.

They also wanted it to be available to all the British Railways Board employees who might be transferred to other employers. That was the final change that the Secretary of State was to make—it was described as the "indefeasible right" of people. I received information that that right might be limited, but I assume from what the Secretary of State has said that that is not so.

But that is not guaranteed. Look at what has happened to some other pension funds, where an employer has a choice between keeping an employee with a more expensive pension fund and a new employee with a cheaper arrangement, because such rights will not apply to him. The Secretary of State is clear about that. He will not accept the amendment that we have tabled to ensure that the pension rights are available to anybody who becomes an employee of the rail industry. We will have two categories of employees—working for the same company, doing the same work—because the pension costs of one will be cheaper than those of the other.

The evidence for that can be found in some of the other privatised British Rail facilities, where, eventually, most of the employees were driven on to the cheaper scheme. They were then told that the scheme was no longer acceptable, because it could not fund itself, the scheme was closed down and then—surprise, surprise—the surplus assets were redistributed to the company, not to the pensioners. There is no guarantee under the Bill that this will not happen. All it says is that one set of employees will be more expensive in social cost than another.

Bearing in mind the Government's attitude towards Europe and social costs—apparently we pride ourselves on having the cheapest labour and cheapest costs—all the Secretary of State is doing is introducing a similar kind of discrimination because the "European" labour will be those employees identified with the indefeasible right and those coming to the industry as new employees will get nothing.

Under those circumstances, I do not think that that right will last very long, because an employer who wants to compete for a particular line—let us say the east coast line—will be able to take on new employees on those new rates. He will also gain a competitive advantage from doing so, because he will be able to bring in new employees without the same pension rights. That is feeding the process of competition and undermining the social rights of employees who come directly under this process.

The Secretary of State said that he had no choice in this because, in the reorganisation, the definition for the suggested break-up of the pension funds comes from the tax authorities.

The Minister of State was good enough to provide me with a report in Committee which made it absolutely clear that there are two ways in which the Inland Revenue rules on membership of centralisation schemes apply. It is possible to have, under the Inland Revenue, an industrywide scheme without having to apportion the resources and assets to individual employees. It is possible to have that under the tax rules.

Committee paper No. 15, provided by the Government, makes it absolutely clear:

"The Inland Revenue permit two types of schemes to be set up where more than one employer participates:

(a) A scheme established to provide benefits solely for the employees of associated employers and/or employees of employers who are associated through a permanent community of interest; and

(b) Schemes established to provide benefits for non-associated employers."

The Inland Revenue definition for the membership of the associated employees provides the crucial fact:

"a centralised scheme for associated employers allows associated employers to provide benefits for all their employees. The associated employers can then adopt any method of funding as if it were a scheme for a single employer, and there need be no "separation" of ownership of assets between participating employers."

So the Government could privatise the railways and keep the pension fund as one fund, as we have called for today, without having to apportion the assets as they have suggested. The Government state that, according to the tax authorities' definition, there is no associated means or common ownership identity between the track authority and British Rail. It is the Government who have chosen to differentiate between the track authority, which will maintain the track, and the operators, in this case known as British Rail.

They have chosen to do that under their reorganisation of the railway system. They have created those separate identities. All the uncertainty arises from the route that the Government have chosen for the reorganisation and privatisation of the railways. The consequences for the pension fund flow from that.

All the uncertainty is of the Government's own making. Even if they had opted for privatisation, they could have retained a single, industrywide pension fund. That is what the employers, the trustees, the trade unions and the pensioners asked for, but the Government have not chosen to meet that request. That choice causes us to have even greater fears about the Government's possible intentions.

We have suggested that the Government's decision is based on the fact that they have their eyes on the assets of the pension fund. The Government have now made it clear

that they have opted for the closed fund, which will still operate within the British Rail pension fund. They must therefore satisfy the House and the pensioners that the terms of the new fund will be no less favourable than those of the old one.

Although the Government are establishing a closed fund of assets within the industry fund, that is no guarantee that that fund will operate on equally favourable conditions to those applying to the original fund. What is likely to happen is that that new fund will be paid what the assets can afford to give it.

There is some dispute about whether the regulations governing the new fund will be brought in on 1 April 1994; perhaps the Government can confirm that one way or another. Whenever that happens, a fund will be established for the pensioners out of the assets of their own original fund. The regulations will be approved by the House and the assets will be managed by the common fund management, but only after a given point in time.

Our new clause is designed to ensure that the judgment about that given time is that of the actuarial authorities and not of the Secretary of State. The new clause would not prevent the Secretary of State from doing what he wants to do, but we do not believe that he can meet his commitment to the effect that the new fund will exist on conditions no less favourable than those operating the original fund. The availability of assets may not allow for that, but we must wait for the decision of the actuarial authorities. We cannot learn of their decision, however, until the regulations and changes proposed by the Secretary of State are made.

At one time, it was the intention of the Secretary of State that the Treasury should have access to the fund. Let me outline a scenario that is not impossible under his terms. He may identify, in the division of the assets, those that will apply to the present pensioners. For the sake of debate, let us value those assets at £4 billion. Once he has identified them, they will be self-managed by the fund managers, with the proviso that, if possible, the same benefits as before will be paid. The Government may then decide, however, that it would be better for the pensioners if they reverted to option 1

He may say to them that the Government will guarantee that their pensions will be inflation-proof. That may look a lot more attractive when the pension fund, broken into its parts, begins not to perform as well as the present BR fund. The pensioners in the closed fund may then find such a guarantee rather attractive. They may then say that they would like to take the Government's original promise, now withdrawn, to inflation-proof the pensions.

7 pm

If pensioners went along that line—the Treasury may want to ask them whether that is the case—the Secretary of State could then go back to the option that he gave us before, whereby the Treasury get the £4 billion and then the Government continue to pay the yearly option. We think that that is wrong, but it is still a possibility. Even under this fund, the Secretary of State must admit that that is a possibility. He does not have to come to a judgment about that until some time after the passing of the Bill.

If the Secretary of State is asking me to accept his assurance that he has no intention of doing that, having already proposed it at one stage, I do not believe him. I do not know what the implications of that are, but I did not believe the Tories who told us that they would not increase VAT. I did not accept the words of the Secretaries of State who told me that they would not increase prescription charges. That is a matter of political judgment. I do not accept the promise of the Secretary of State for Transport, any more than I did the other promises.

However, I am prepared to accept—we shall wait for history to decide who is right on that political judgment—that the new clause at least allows the judgment to be made. Whatever the Secretary of State does with the funds must be done with the agreement of the trustees on the basis of the actuarial authority's report, not his judgment after consulting the trustees. That is not good enough. We press the new clause because we want to give pensioners some assurance and protection.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall endeavour to be brief and, wherever possible, not repeat points that I made earlier.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) complained that the announcement made last week came too late. It seems that one cannot win. If one decides to go out and consult on what are readily agreed by all to be extremely complex matters, and takes a reasonable proportion of time to enable all who have been consulted to consider them and respond, one is then accused of coming forward late with the proposals.

My hon. Friends the Members for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) and for City of Chester (Mr. Brandreth) were right. We looked carefully at all the issues before we drew up the original document in January. The document then listed eight issues about which views would be welcomed. As these are complex matters, it took time for everyone to respond, but that is what we did.

In the light of those responses, we took firm decisions. I had originally told everyone that I had hoped to make the decisions, knowing that it would be quite an effort, by the end of this month. I brought it forward to enable our decisions to inform this debate. I do not make any apologies for the time in which we announced the decisions, because I think that it was right to do the full consultation.

Mr. Denham: Does the Secretary of State accept that my point was not so much that we got the final version last Thursday as that the Government's outline plans, which have caused so much fuss, came forward only in January, while the rest of the privatisation proposals were published last July?

Mr. MacGregor: These are complex issues, as is shown by the way in which the responses have come through, and we took some time so as to offer fair choices.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) has to accept that one can give no guarantees about the performance of funds. There are some 60 British Rail closed funds. Some are small, but one is very large. They have performed well throughout the 1980s, but there is no guarantee that any of them will continue to perform that well. When it eventually gets to the point of being a closed fund, the new fund will be very large.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) was right to say that performance can be variable, and that there can be no guarantee of indexation even within an open fund. It will depend on the performance of the economy and of the trustees. I find it ironic that we were offering option 2 as a safe guarantee to existing pensioners when I know that many employees and

[Mr. MacGregor]

pensioners in occupational funds in other sectors of the economy look with envious eyes at the civil service guaranteed index-linked pension fund. I thought that we were making a pretty fair offer.

Did I hear the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) correctly? Did he say that I should keep open the possibility of the option that he has so derided up to now and that has been the basis of his accusation that the Treasury wishes to purloin funds? If that is what he meant, he has performed an interesting somersault.

Mr. Prescott: If the reorganisation of the pension fund that the Government intend to make makes it less of a contributor to the inflation payments and real value increases that have been made under the old scheme, pensioners might feel that any promise of a link to inflation was better than what would result from the performance of the new pension fund. In those circumstances, the Secretary of State might want to consult them again, to offer them option 1 or option 2, because the Treasury would then have a chance to get at the £4 billion.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it clear that the Treasury getting its hands on the funds is not the purpose of option 2, and never was. The purpose is entirely to give a reasonable alternative choice to pensioners. By and large, they have rejected that, which is why we have come to the conclusion on the two options that we have offered.

It is an interesting suggestion that if, in 10 years' time, they realise that they have made the wrong choice—I am talking entirely hypothetically—they should be able to change their minds. That underlines the point that I was making. There can be no guarantee of performance on either an open or closed fund that does not have the benefit of a full Government guarantee. The choice has been made, and I have responded favourably to the choice that most people wanted.

Millions of individuals have personal pensions and, on their retirement, will be dependent entirely on the performance of funds. That will be individual to them, as with life policies, and it will vary between individuals. That is in the nature of the performance of investment funds. The hon. Member for Nottingham, East again made the accusation that the Government will purloin the funds, but there is no question of that. The pensions belong to the pensioners, and I have made that clear.

The hon. Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston), who is no longer here, asked what would happen to the fund, once it had closed, when there was no employer. There was a slight implication that the Government should step in and secure some of the funds in such a case. There is no question of that. When the fund is closed, no one other than the pensioners will be the beneficiaries of the fund, and it will be for the pensioner trustees to decide how to do that.

The hon. Members for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Kingston upon Hull, East spoke of the necessity of having the approval of the trustees for every step that would be taken. There is a difficulty about that, because in effect it amounts to a veto. Opposition Members have said that, while I might be reasonable in all the decisions that I take, some future Secretary of State might not, so one has to look at all possible situations.

The pensioner trustees might refuse to agree to any solution other than an enormous skewing of the division of funds, against actuarial advice, in favour of the existing pensioners. I do not think that that would happen, but we must allow the House to make the final decision rather than leaving it totally to the pensioner trustees. If they had a total veto, they would have a power that could be exercised against the interests of future taxpayers who would have to top up any existing pension funds.

That is one reason why we cannot accept the veto. I have made it clear that we shall consult the pensioner trustees, and that the division of the funds when that point comes will be based on independent actuarial advice. There will be no question of political interference. The matter will be discussed fully in the House, with an independent report if the pensioner trustees disagree on anything, and decided by affirmative resolution.

I want to make one thing clear to the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) about the joint industry scheme. Where any employer, including any future employer, has some employees who have stayed within the scheme because they have exercised what is known as their indefeasible right to do so, that employer will have to be in the joint industry scheme for those employees.

However, new employees—this is the difference between us—will not have the right, by right, to join that scheme. We believe that the pension rights for new employees of franchisees, recruited in the future, must be a matter for negotiation between the new employee and the employer. It is not for the Government to dictate the terms and conditions of employment for new recruits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Milligan) asked me about the position under a closed scheme. When the fund is closed, it will have sufficient funds to secure the actuarially calculated liabilities. That is a crucial point for all pensioners, and it underlines the points that I have made about independent actuarial valuation. The benefits will be as stated in the rules, including index-linking, but if the fund does better than expected, further enchancements to benefits may be made. That will be a decision for the pension trustees.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) prayed in aid the *Financial Times* in suggesting that others had also said that the Government wanted to purloin the pension funds. He quoted the figure of £8·5 billion, which actually shows the inaccuracy of that report. By no stretch of the imagination could it ever be said that the sum involved was £8·5 billion.

The article was also wrong to suggest that I was beating a retreat. In no way could I have been doing so, when I was still consulting and had not made a decision. In any case, I had two options available, so there could not have been any retreat. I made it clear that, at those early stages, we were not stating any preference for either of the options.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that, when the *Financial Times* speaks, it is always right, as he suggested, I hope that he will read its leader today on our reforms as a whole, and support us in the Lobby on Third Reading. The leader comments favourably on the proposals as a whole.

We have had a full debate on this important matter. I warmly welcome that, because the pensions issue is extremely important. I commend the Government's amendments but, for the reasons that I have given, I must reject the new clause.

Dr. Marek: In view of the right hon. Gentleman's acceptance of the spirit of new clause 3 and amendment No. 2, and his undertaking that he will rephrase them and put them in a more appropriate place in the Bill when it reaches another place, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 29

JOINT INDUSTRY PENSION SCHEME

'.—(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, the Secretary of State shall not exercise any of his functions under this Act relating to pensions until he has consulted the trustees of any existing scheme (within the meaning of Schedule 10) and such other persons as may have an interest, or appear to the Secretary of State to represent persons having an interest in any existing scheme, as to the feasibility of establishing a joint industry scheme, the form such a scheme might take, and the implications for participants in existing schemes.

(2) Subsection (1) above shall not apply in any case where the trustees of a scheme have received actuarial advice that the fund may not be able to meet any of its actual or projected liabilities at any time from its actual or projected assets.'.—*[Mr. Prescott.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time——

The House divided: Ayes 270, Noes 304.

Division No. 278] **[7 13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack

Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Spellar and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel

Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'f'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 10

PENSIONS

Amendments made: No. 106, in page 165, line 20, at end insert:

'Payments in final discharge of liabilities under s.52(1) of the Transport Act 1980

7A.—(1) In section 52 of the Transport Act 1980, in subsection (1) (which requires the Secretary of State to make payments each year to B.R. pension schemes in respect of unfunded pension obligations owed by the Board), after the words "Subject to the provisions of this section" there shall be inserted the words ", section 52A" and after that section there shall be inserted—

"*Power to make payments by way of final discharge of liabilities under s.52(1).*

52A.—(1) If the Minister is desirous of making to the persons administering a B.R. pension scheme one or more payments by way of final discharge of his liability to make payments to them under section 52(1) in respect of the proportion which has not been funded, as determined for the purposes of section 52(1)(a), of so much of any relevant pension obligations as are owed in respect of—

(a) all pension rights under the scheme,
(b) pension rights of some particular class or description under the scheme, or
(c) pension rights of persons of some particular class or description under the scheme,

he may give to the persons administering the scheme a notice identifying the pension rights in question and specifying in relation to those pension rights the matters set out in subsection (2), as determined in accordance with the following provisions of this section.

(2) The matters mentioned in subsection (1) are—
(a) the capital value of the attributable unfunded obligations in question, as at the beginning of the next financial year;
(b) the amount or amounts, or the method of determining the amount or amounts, of the payment or payments to be made under this section by way of final discharge of the Minister's liability under section 52(1) to make payments in respect of the attributable unfunded obligations; and
(c) the date or dates on which that payment or those payments are to be made.

(3) In making any determination for the purposes of paragraph (b) of subsection (2), the amount or, as the case may be, the aggregate of the amounts mentioned in that paragraph shall be such as to include—
(a) a sum equal to the capital value determined under paragraph (a) of that subsection; and
(b) interest, payable at such rate as may be determined by the Minister, on so much (if any) of that sum as may from time to time be outstanding after the beginning of the financial year mentioned in the said paragraph (a).

(4) For the purposes of this section, the capital value mentioned in paragraph (a) of subsection (2) shall either—
(a) be determined by the Minister, or
(b) if the Minister so requires in the particular case, be determined by the actuary to the scheme in question and approved by the Minister,

and it shall be for the Minister to determine the matters mentioned in paragraphs (b) and (c) of that subsection.

(5) Notice under subsection (1) above shall only be given after consultation—
(a) with the persons administering the scheme in question; and
(b) with the actuary to that scheme, except in a case where the capital value mentioned in subsection (2)(a) is determined by that actuary pursuant to subsection (4)(b);

and any such notice must be given not less than one month before the beginning of the financial year mentioned in subsection (2)(a).

(6) The giving of a notice under subsection (1) shall—
(a) terminate the liability of the Minister to make payments under section 52(1) in respect of the attributable unfunded obligations in question for financial years beginning after the giving of the notice; and
(b) impose upon the Minister a duty—
(i) to make to the persons administering the scheme in question the payment or payments mentioned in subsection (2)(b); and
(ii) to do so at the time or times specified in pursuance of subsection (2)(c).

(7) Where notice has been given under subsection (1), the Minister may—
(a) at any time before the expiration of the period of eleven months beginning with the financial year mentioned in subsection (2)(a) as it applies in relation to that notice, and
(b) after consultation with the persons administering the scheme in question and the actuary to the scheme,

amend that notice by giving notice of the amendment to the persons administering the scheme.

(8) If notice is given under subsection (7) of an amendment affecting the amount of a payment which has been made pursuant to this section, the Minister may also give notice to the persons administering the scheme in question requiring them—
(a) to repay to him so much of the payment made as exceeds the amended amount; and
(b) to pay interest to him, at such rate as he may determine, on the amount to be repaid, as from the date on which the payment in question was made by him;

and where notice is given under paragraph (a) or (b), the amount required to be repaid or, as the case may be, the amount of interest required to be paid from time to time, shall be treated as a debt due from those persons to the Minister.

(9) Nothing in this section affects the liability of the Board in respect of any relevant pension obligations, but where any liability of the Minister to make payments under section 52(1) has been terminated by virtue of paragraph (a) of subsection (6), the amount of any payments required to be made by the Minister under section 52(1) shall be determined for each of the financial years mentioned in that paragraph as if the Board's liability in respect of the attributable unfunded obligations mentioned in that paragraph had been discharged.

(10) In this section—
"attributable unfunded obligations" means the proportion which has not been funded, as determined for the purposes of section 52(1)(a), of so much of the relevant pension obligations mentioned in subsection (1) as are owed in respect of the pension rights identified pursuant to that subsection;
"capital value", in relation to any attributable unfunded obligations, means the capital equivalent, actuarially determined, of the payments that would, apart from this section, have been expected to be made by the Minister under section 52(1) in respect of those attributable unfunded obligations for the successive financial years beginning with the one mentioned in subsection (2)(a).

(11) Any sums required for the making of payments under this section by the Minister shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament."

(2) In section 70 of that Act, in subsection (2), (interpretation) for the definition of "the Minister" there shall be substituted—

""the Minister" means the Secretary of State;".

Application and modification of Part III of the 1980 Act

7B.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order designate—

(a) any occupational pension scheme which would not, apart from this paragraph, be included among the pension schemes which are B.R. pension schemes for the purposes of Part III of the 1980 Act, or

(b) any section of an occupational pension scheme, being a section which would not, apart from this paragraph, be included among those schemes,

as a pension scheme which is to be treated as included among those schemes for the purpose of requiring or enabling him to make to the persons administering the scheme payments under section 52(1) or 52A of that Act in respect of qualifying pension rights transferred (whether under paragraph 4 above or otherwise) so as to become pension rights under that scheme.

(2) An order under sub-paragraph (1) above may make provision, in any case where qualifying pension rights of any persons are transferred as mentioned in that sub-paragraph, for treating those persons as constituting a section of the occupational pension scheme to which those qualifying pension rights are so transferred.

(3) No order shall be made under sub-paragraph (1) above except after consultation with the trustees of the occupational pension scheme to which the qualifying pension rights are transferred.

(4) Subject to the following provisions of this paragraph, Part III of the 1980 Act shall have effect as if any reference in that Part to a B.R. pension scheme included a reference to a designated scheme.

(5) Where qualifying pension rights are transferred to a designated scheme as mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above, the proportion referred to in section 52(1)(a) of the 1980 Act in its application by virtue of this paragraph in relation to the designated scheme shall, instead of being determined under section 54 of that Act, be taken to be the proportion which has been determined under that section in relation to the B.R. pension scheme from which the qualifying pension rights are transferred; and references in Part III of that Act to that proportion shall be construed accordingly.

(6) In the application of Part III of the 1980 Act in relation to a designated scheme, references in that Part to "the relevant pension obligations" shall, in relation to the designated scheme, be construed—

(a) as if the reference in section 53(1)(a) of that Act to obligations of the Board which were owed on 1st January 1975 in connection with the scheme were a reference to so much of the obligations of the Board which were owed on that date in connection with a B.R. pension scheme as are obligations in respect of qualifying pension rights transferred to the designated scheme; and

(b) as if the reference in section 53(1)(c) of that Act to an obligation of the Board arising after that date to pay or secure the payment of increases payable under the scheme included a reference to so much of any such obligation of the Board in respect of a B.R. pension scheme as is an obligation in respect of qualifying pension rights transferred to the designated scheme.

(7) In the application of section 55 of the 1980 Act in relation to a designated scheme, paragraph (a) of subsection (1) (which requires the proportion of the scheme's outgoings which corresponds to the relevant pension obligations to be determined before the beginning of each financial year or, in the case of the first financial year, as soon as practicable after the passing of that Act) shall be taken to require the proportion mentioned in that paragraph to be determined —

(a) before the beginning of the financial year in question, or

(b) as soon as practicable after the coming into force of the order under sub-paragraph (1) above by virtue of which the scheme in question is a designated scheme,

and paragraph (b) of that subsection shall be construed accordingly.

(8) The power to give a direction under section 57 of the 1980 Act (which provides for certain determinations to be made as if no transfer had taken place) shall be exercisable in any case where the whole or any part of a person's accrued pension rights under a B.R. pension scheme or a designated scheme are transferred (whether under paragraph 4 above or otherwise) to—

(a) a designated scheme, or

(b) a pension scheme established by the Board,

as it is in the case of any such transfer as is mentioned in that section.

(9) Without prejudice to section 59(1) of the 1980 Act (which provides that the making of payments under section 52(1) does not discharge certain relevant pension obligations), the making of any payment under section 52(1) of the 1980 Act to the persons administering a designated scheme shall not discharge any relevant pension obligation, so far as it is an obligation to pay pensions or increases of pensions under that or any other designated scheme, or under a B.R. pension scheme, or is an obligation to secure the payment of those pensions or increases.

(10) Without prejudice to section 59(2) of the 1980 Act (power to amend pension scheme for certain purposes), if the persons administering an occupational pension scheme would not otherwise have power to do so, they may amend the scheme by instrument in writing for the purpose of enabling persons to be admitted as members of the scheme on the basis that payments will fall to be made under Part III of the 1980 Act in respect of qualifying pension rights of theirs which are transferred so as to become pension rights under the scheme.

(11) Where the persons administering an occupational scheme have power, apart from sub-paragraph (10) above, to amend the scheme for the purpose mentioned in that sub-paragraph, they may exercise that power for that purpose without regard to any limitations on the exercise of the power and without compliance with any procedural provisions applicable to its exercise.

(12) Any reference in Part III of the 1980 Act to a "financial year" shall, in relation to a designated scheme, be taken as a reference—

(a) to such period as—

(i) begins with the transfer of the qualifying pension rights in question, and

(ii) ends with the last day of an accounting year of the scheme,

and is a period of not less than twelve months and less than two years; and

(b) to each successive accounting year of that scheme.

(13) Where any provision of Part III of the 1980 Act requires anything to be done in, or in relation to, the first financial year of a B.R. pension scheme, that provision shall (so far as so requiring) be disregarded in the application of that Part in relation to a designated scheme.

(14) In any case where—

(a) the whole or any part of a person's accrued pension rights under a B.R. pension scheme are transferred so as to become pension rights under a designated scheme, and

(b) immediately before that transfer takes effect, relevant pension obligations a proportion of which, as determined for the purposes of section 52(1)(a) of the 1980 Act, has not been funded are owed in respect of those pension rights by the Board to the persons administering the pension scheme from which the pension rights are so transferred,

an order under sub-paragraph (1) above may provide for the benefit of that proportion of so much of those relevant pension obligations as are owed in respect of those pension rights to be transferred, so as to become relevant pension obligations owed by the Board to the persons administering the pension scheme to which the pension rights are transferred.

(15) Where the benefit of any relevant pension obligations is transferred by virtue of sub-paragraph (14) above, the persons administering the pension scheme to which the benefit of those obligations is transferred shall have, in relation to the relevant pension obligations the benefit of which is so transferred, all the rights of the persons administering the pension scheme from which the benefit of those obligations is transferred.

(16) In this paragraph—

"the 1980 Act" means the Transport Act 1980;

"designated scheme" means an occupational pension scheme or, as the case may be, a section of any such scheme, which is designated under sub-paragraph (1) above;

"pension scheme" includes a section of a pension scheme;

"qualifying pension rights" means any pension rights as respects the whole or some part of which there are subsisting relevant pension obligations a proportion of which, as determined for the purposes of section 52(1)(a) of the 1980 Act, has not been funded;

and, subject to that, expressions used in this paragraph and in Part III of the 1980 Act have the same meaning in this paragraph as they have in that Part.'.

No. 107, in page 165, line 29, leave out sub-paragraph (2).—*[Mr. MacGregor]*.

New clause 16

CONTRACTS BETWEEN THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR AND THE BOARD ETC. FOR THE PROVISION OF NON-FRANCHISED RAILWAY PASSENGER SERVICES

'.—(1) The Franchising Director may enter into agreements with the Board or any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board for the provision by the Board or subsidiary of any railway passenger services which are not provided under a franchise agreement.

(2) Any sums required by the Franchising Director for the making of payments under any agreement entered into by virtue of this section shall be paid by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament.

(3) Any sums received by the Franchising Director under any such agreement shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund' —*[Mr. MacGregor]*.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. MacGregor: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this it will be convenient to discuss also new clause 27—*Powers of Franchising Director to enter into agreement with the Board, etc.*—

'( )(1)The Franchising Director may enter into agreements with the Board or any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board for the provision by the Board or subsidiary of any railway passenger services which are not provided under a franchise agreement.

(2) Any sums required by the Board by virtue of this section shall be paid by the Secretary of State to the Board out of money provided by Parliament.'.

Mr. MacGregor: The purpose of the new clause is to put beyond doubt the ability of the franchising director to enter into agreements with the BR board or its wholly owned subsidiaries. As the House will recognise, this covers the period while franchising is being introduced, where the franchising director is to assume responsibility for payment of all subsidy in respect of passenger services to the board and to franchisees. The measure covers the BR board and its wholly owned subsidiaries because the franchising director's contracts may be directly with the shadow franchise operating units as they are formed rather than globally with the board. The new clause is designed to clarify that.

The new clause also enables me to say a word or two about the shadow franchise operating units. Earlier this afternoon I answered a question about the way in which we suggest that the rest of BR's passenger services should be set up as franchising units for ultimate franchising. Copies of the answer and of the document giving the breakdown of the different franchise units are now in the Vote Office.

Mr. Prescott: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that we are continually being fed information just minutes before debates take place. It is impossible to debate these matters properly when we are handed five or six pages just before a debate—and this comes on top of today's other statement about franchising. There is another document relating to the exemptions, to which the Secretary of State may refer today.

7.30 pm

Mr. MacGregor: Tomorrow.

Mr. Prescott: Even so, the right hon. Gentleman is creating real difficulties, and I hope that he will bear that in mind when he explains those documents. I was given some indication of the document to which the Secretary of State is now referring at 11 o'clock, and received it a little later than it would have been available to most right hon. and hon. Members, in the Library. We should be grateful for some explanation now.

Mr. MacGregor: That document does not affect decisions relating to new clause 16, so therefore it was not essential to produce it today. In fact, we could have delayed it for a considerable time. The exemptions document will be relevant to debates tomorrow.

The franchise proposals are to allow BR to start thinking about the restructuring of the remaining franchise units and to enable people more widely to see how we propose the breakdown. The document was not required for tonight's debate, but I thought that it would be convenient to mention it—since we are discussing shadow franchise operating units.

On Second Reading, I announced the first seven franchise units and British Rail is currently restructuring their management, operation and financial accounting. Those seven will be among the first to be franchised—one or two of them, we hope, later next year. It is important for BR to move ahead with those so that operational experience may be gained and the units can be set up with a track record under the new arrangements well before the franchising director puts those franchises out to tender. In that way, applicants will have some financial and other basis on which to make their bids.

The designation of the groupings that I published today is not a complete blueprint. There are proposals for 25 franchise units and we think that it will probably work out

[Mr. MacGregor]

like that. However, the designation is incomplete for two reasons. For some parts of the network—InterCity cross-country services, Regional Railways long-distance inter-urban services, and the central region of Regional Railways—I have not yet taken decisions as to how they should best be packaged for franchising. They will be reviewed over the next few months.

Also, the final form of franchises will be determined by the franchising director, who will want—as we have emphasised throughout—to take a view of the market at the time and to respond to market indications. In some cases, the director may want the franchises to be handled differently. So the designation is not a blueprint, but an indication of how things are likely to end up—and the basis on which British Rail will restructure. It is substantially the plan for transferring the whole passenger network to franchises.

As I said, the network will be divided into 25 businesses, but the crucial point is that, by and large, we are basing them on existing British Rail profit centres. That has a number of advantages for BR in restructuring and for management-employee buy-outs—which we are keen to encourage and for which we are providing financial assistance—which will more readily recognise most of the franchise units. That arrangement is also much in line with the recommendations in the Transport Select Committee's final report. We took note of that Committee's views and that is another example of identity of thinking. We were working on the same lines, leading to the announcement.

Some units, however, do not follow the profit centres exactly. As 25 are announced and there are only 19 profit centres, it is clear that there are some splits. I have already announced that one is the Isle of Wight. That split is sensible, because the local community has long wanted to run its own railway, and it is a discrete unit. Others are based partly on responses to the original consultation document and partly on our belief that one can produce smaller but viable units that make perfectly good franchising sense.

That designation is now available to the House and to the wider public and I hope that it will prove helpful as a further development of our proposals in the gradual evolution of the reforms for British Rail.

As to new clause 16, it is our policy that the franchising director should be responsible for paying all subsidy in respect of passenger rail services, excluding payments made by the PTEs. While franchising is being introduced, that will mean the director making payments both to franchisees where franchises have been granted and to the BR board where they have not. As the new clauses indicates, he may also enter into agreements directly with the operating subsidiaries that BR will form to run the services in preparation for franchising—the shadow franchises.

We think that there is a clear case for making the franchising director responsible for paying all support in respect of passenger railway services, excluding that paid by PTEs from April 1994, but including payments to franchisees and to BR while it is still running passenger services. I therefore invite the House to reject new clause 27.

New clause 16 will make for clear financial management. Franchises will commence throughout the year—they will not all start at the beginning of the financial year and therefore they will not all be granted to commence on 1 April. It therefore makes sense for one person—the franchising director—to be responsible for making the necessary accounting arrangements, to switch subsidy between BR and franchisees in-year. If that were not done, there would have to be some shift of subsidy between whoever, under any alternative arrangements, makes the subsidy payments to BR and the franchising director, who would pay subsidies to franchisees.

There would be further transitional difficulties. If there were two separate pools of subsidies to passenger services, as new clause 27 indicates, their size would have to be settled in the annual public expenditure round—which would be announced in the autumn statement in November but almost certainly settled before then. If new franchises were to operate in the next financial year in question—from 1 April, say—they would not actually be settled until well after the autumn statement. There would then need to be further transfers. In terms of clear financial management, it makes sense to have subsidies allocated by one person.

Mr. Prescott: Presumably the moneys paid to the franchise director—however they may be apportioned between British Rail operations, shadow operations, and existing franchise operations—will still be seen as moneys paid from the public purse. So they will still be affected by anything that happens in the public expenditure round.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Those moneys would not only be affected by the public expenditure round but directly settled and decided in the annual public expenditure round in the normal way—because it would be subsidy direct from the taxpayer. Moreover, it is important to maintain public accountability.

Another advantage of adopting our approach is that it would establish a system under which, from the outset, the roles and responsibilities of the various players will be clear. The Secretary of State will be responsible for the total size of the budget for supporting passenger railway services, while the franchising director would be responsible for spending that budget in a way that will achieve his objectives and obtain good value for money.

The third reason for adopting our proposal and not new clause 27 is that it will assist the process of shadow running. Before a service is franchised, it will be run as a shadow franchise by British Rail, which will form a discrete subsidiary for each proposed franchise to run the services in question. Shadow running will generate information on both the operation and its costs. That information will enable the franchising director to take final decisions on the franchise to be offered to bidders, as defined in the invitation to tender, and on the value for money offered by bids, judged against the cost of British Rail continuing to run the service.

To channel the subsidy through the franchising director will, I believe, allow him to enter into agreements not just with the British Railways Board but directly with the British Rail subsidiaries. That has some advantages, which I think are important.

That brings me almost to the end of what I want to say in what I hope will be a short debate. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East wants, in new clause 27, grants to continue to be provided to British Rail by the Secretary

of State. That means that the cost of supporting rail services would remain hidden within a vast block grant. For some reason, the Opposition do not trust the franchising director's ability to make payments to British Rail, or perhaps they are unhappy about the transparency that the new arrangements will bring. I can think of no other reason why they should want to delay the point at which the franchising director becomes responsible for the total budget for supporting passenger railway services. As I have already said, I see clear advantages in going down the route that we recommend. Therefore, I commend new clause 16 to the House and invite it to reject new clause 27.

Mr. Prescott: The Secretary of State stuck closely to his notes, but these matters are still under discussion and late decisions could be made. As he explained, new clause 16 gives all the resources to the franchising director, who will receive them, presumably, from the Secretary of State for Transport who will negotiate them with the Treasury. The difference between the two new clauses is that we have chosen to identify that section that he has already said is a candidate for franchising. It covers seven areas. Today, the Secretary of State identified another 18. Those 25 areas account for practically the whole of the railway system. The exception that he is still considering is the Isle of Wight, and perhaps another area.

The Secretary of State said today that he has now identified all the areas that are likely to make up the character of future franchises. Managements can now look at the railway system and identify those areas. They account for the greater part of the railway system that the Secretary of State—presumably after discussion with the franchising director—thinks will provide a commercial railway, or one that will be available for bids under the franchise arrangments.

The first seven are probably more attractive than the other 18 that have been announced today. Perhaps one should compare the InterCity east coast main line with the strategic route along the west coast main line. Those two main lines face completly different problems. A common feature of both lines is that both run from London to Scotland, with one going up the east coast and the other up the west coast, but that is where the similarity ends. There has been considerable investment in the track and rolling stock and in the electification of the east coat main line. However, investment is desperately needed on the west coast main line. About £1 billion of investment is needed to modernise the line from London up the west coast to Scotland. It is at this point that the differences begin to emerge.

The Secretary of State says that he considers that these lines are likely to be candidates for franchising. If somebody said to him, "I'm interested in the west coast main line, but I want to go only as far as Manchester and I don't want to operate up to Scotland," I wonder what his reaction would be? People fear that that is where the west coast main line will end and that the route to Scotland will be by means of the east coast main line.

Can the Secretary of State guarantee that the InterCity network route to Glasgow will continue and that a through service will be retained from London up the north-west coast to Glasgow? That question arises from the implication of his announcement. InterCity is, effectively, finished. There will no longer be a corporate body, InterCity. All the argument about who will get the InterCity logo is finished. None of these lines could claim it. I suppose they could claim it to a certain extent, but a corporate identity, with one body providing a connection between all our main cities, will be removed. Those services will be provided by individual operators bidding for the franchises for about 25 services.

7.45 pm

I presume that the Secretary of State believes that those are the possibilities, but the services provided will be determined by the people who make the bids and by whether they receive sufficient subsidies from the Government to maintain them. Not all those services can be described as cherry-picked lines that will provide profits. The east coast main line makes a profit, which is estimated to be about £70 million. We should prefer the Secretary of State to have a global amount with which to provide a network service, because of the issue and principle of cross-subsidy.

I have listened to transport debates ever since I became a Member of Parliament 20 or so years ago. What characterises the difference between the two sides is the cross-subsidy factor. Many Conservative Members say that cross-subsidy undermines competition. Anybody who knows anything about transport, whether it be public or private transport, recognises that peak-time services are subsidised in one form or another. Under the InterCity network concept, it is recognised that some areas are less profitable than others and that a network service must be provided. A network service means that communities throughout the country can be assured of the maintenance of a railway network.

Let me give an example. My Hull constituency is tagged on to the InterCity network. There are only two services, one each way. I have no doubt that some people who run InterCity would like to lop off the InterCity service to Hull, because the part of the network that runs between Doncaster and Hull is probably not as profitable to them as it would be if they were able to run it directly from York to London. If it takes an hour for a complete set to be diverted from Doncaster to Hull and an hour for it to return to Doncaster, that amounts to one leg of the journey up to York. If it is thought that more money can be earned by providing a frequent service, the commercial ethos, the desire to maximise profit, will undermine the network requirement for a connection to Hull.

The Secretary of State will probably tell me that it will still be possible to maintain a service, that the franchising director will look at the old pacer train, or one of the new regional trains, and say, "Look, you can still get to Hull in the same time as the InterCity takes." But that will not be a through service. When travelling from one city to another, most people like to do the journey in one haul. They do not like having to change trains.

If we want to encourage people to get out of their cars and travel on public transport—to take the Hull example again—people will stay on the motorway to get to London instead of going by public transport, if there is no through service. The lack of a through service will lead to people being discouraged from using public transport. That is true of many other areas besides Hull. InterCity has cut off Cleveland, Shrewsbury and Blackpool. Substantial communities such as those are entitled to some form of network service to London, although perhaps not so frequent a service as the services to York or to our other main cities. At least one through service should be provided.

The provision of through services will not, however, be provided by the market. The market will determine what is the maximum revenue and the maximum profit. I cite as examples the east coast and the west coast main lines.

If the franchising operator gets the profits from our £500 million investment in the east coast main line, the £70 million will not be used to reinvest in the west coast line but will go to those operating the franchise. It will be profit for shareholders or those who have invested, and we shall presumably have to pay a considerable sum to whoever takes over the west coast main line.

The concept of cross-subsidisation is at the heart of a good transport policy. If we want to maintain that principle, it is critical that we get people out of their cars and on to the trains. I understand that the Secretary of State has found another solution—charge people to use the roads. On Wednesday, we shall perhaps hear more about road pricing and tolls and making it so damned expensive for cars that people will have to use the trains. That is one way of forcing people into the hands of those who will make money out of the syatem, but it is not the best or most rational way of dealing with the environmental and congestion problems.

Our approach to the Bill characterises our approach to transport in general. It is not surprising that we find the franchising process outlined in the Bill unacceptable for transport and environmental reasons and the reduction of congestion. We hear what the Secretary of State says, but we dispute and reject it. I should have thought that the process runs counter to the public service obligation which was originally introduced by a Labour Government.

The aim of the PSO is to recognise the need for a social railway system and to tell the management that we know it cannot make a profit but we shall pay because the community desires to maintain a network of 11,000 miles. That was the idea behind the PSO. It was called a PSO when we entered into the European agreement for the payment of subsidies. We entered into a social contract and agreed to pay a contribution to the running of a social railway.

However, we always specified that InterCity was different. We said that it was not entitled to a subsidy, but the Government are now going to pay to InterCity subsidies that they have not paid for a number of years. They always took the view that InterCity was not to be regarded as part of the social railway. The Secretary of State now proposes to bring InterCity into that category and, along with it, the freight system which we shall debate later. We are now to have a social freight service. I presume that another factor to be taken into account is that it is the Secretary of State who will govern the finances for the social railway. We shall not be absolved from responsibility but will presumably have to get the money and judge where it should be used to make up the difference in the track costs under the social freight concept which he has just announced.

The Secretary of State is introducing even greater subsidies without a guarantee for the network. I mentioned InterCity lines such as the west cost line which, because of the need for capital and massive maintenance costs, are not profitable. Would it not be better for the Secretary of State to cross-subsidise the whole system, issue the money in one payment and tell InterCity that he wants it to run a network service? He cannot do that if it is divided among different operators. That is the craziness of the system on which he has embarked.

Another criticism is that not only is the Secretary of State moving away from the PSO concept identified in the European agreement but he is doing something else that is causing considerable concern, as highlighted in our safety inquiries. Managers are obsessed with the organisation of the railway, not with how to produce a new, good or even a safe railway. They spend all their time jockeying to see what board they can get on and what they can do about their wages and conditions. Very little time is spent trying to produce the best possible railway with inadequate finances.

The Clapham inquiry warned us that so much time is being taken up by management concerns that the commercial ethos and the pursuit of profit are beginning to undermine the very safety of the railway. We were warned not to allow that to continue, but the Secretary of State's announcement is a signal to all British Rail managers to stand by to make a few bob because British Rail is finished and there will be no social railway system and no subsidised or non-subsidised railway. He is making it clear that the whole system is up for grabs, but he knows that, even if he wished it, that will not happen this century.

Some of the system may be gone. The Secretary of State may wave a few flags—like the Minister for Public Transport, who raised the flag on private organisations such as Stagecoach, which did not last six months—and say, "I launch this new privatised service." However, as the track will belong to someone else and, under the leasing arrangements, the assets will belong to another authority, we shall merely have caught people to manage the system. As Sir Peter Parker pointed out in his article today, they will not control anything because we shall merely be buying management skills, which will not make it difficult for us to bring the system back into public accountability, to which we are committed.

The process will not improve the railway system one jot, but will take the managers' minds off reality. The only way to maintain the network and the safety of the system is to make it clear, as we do in new clause 27, that, in the areas not passed to franchise operation, in the maintenance of a social network and in compliance with the European arrangements, the money should be paid for network provision to the remaining non-franchised parts of the service. That should be the Secretary of State's responsibility. If the right hon. Gentleman passes it wholly to the franchising director who is obliged to encourage as many private operators as possible, will there not be a danger that so much money will be given to private operators—as the Government are pressing him to do—that he will have no money left for the less profitable parts of the system?

It is true that the Secretary of State has now made it clear that the announcements that are made in the public expenditure round for the PSO payment—let us say that it is £1 billion, as it has doubled in the past few years—will no longer be governed by that particular year. When the legislation was first introduced, it was agreed that the figure could not rise above that announced in the public expenditure round. By removing that provision, the Secretary of State has made it clear that it is open ended. Open ended can mean many things but, in the Treasury's present frame of mind, it does not mean more money. It means that money will be squeezed. Does anyone believe that the railways will receive more subsidy against the background of a £50 billion public borrowing deficit? If it is left to the franchising director to decide, will it not mean

that the least profitable and most socially necessary railways will suffer—the rural stations and the very areas for which we want to maintain 11,000 miles of track?

The essential point is that, according to the PSO, which we accepted under the European arrangement, we agreed not to reduce services but to provide sufficient money to maintain the system at its existing level, which was always measured to be 10,000 or 11,000 miles. How will that be maintained? How are we to observe the quality of service that we are obliged to provide under the European agreement? Will it be the franchising director's responsibility or the Secretary of State's?

The Secretary of State is the only one who signs the agreement and is responsible for the Government's policy. The franchising director is not independent—as we know from the legislation, at end of the day he is accountable to the Secretary of State. Will the money be provided to meet the obligation? We want the Secretary of State to be answerable. We do not want him telling the House that the franchising director had told him that he had enough money but that people were not efficient or that too many people were employed and paid too much overtime.

The Secretary of State has avoided giving answers about British Rail many times. He has caused more parliamentary questions to be asked than anyone else and does not come to the Dispatch Box very often to explain what he is doing. It is rare for us to get him into television studios, never mind the House of Commons. However, in spite of that and in spite of the nature of the present Secretary of State, we want him to be answerable.

We must rely on the fact that the PSO payment is largely about maintaining a social railway. Privatisation is about making profit for the private sector. We want the money to be retained by the Secretary of State for the maintenance of a public network. He should be answerable to the House, which is the purpose of new clause 27.

8 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Listening to the Secretary of State is an enormously depressing experience. Anyone who has sat through railway debates over the years, as many of us have, must be struck by the sense that there is little new under the sun. There is nothing at all new about successive Secretaries of State, except the personality of the person at the Dispatch Box. Secretaries of State come and go. I read in the newspapers that this one is not long for us, and that he has other fish to fry and other jobs in mind. No doubt his successor will trot out the same fallacies that the right hon. Gentleman has given us this afternoon.

The Railways Act 1974, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) referred, came about in part because of the inexact nature of planning subsidies to the railways on a line-by-line basis. Before the 1974 Act, the subsidy paid to a particular line was based on an annual and occasionally twice-yearly passenger count on that line. It was, as I have said, a fairly inexact science, and one that most people connected with the railway industry were glad to see disappear following the passage of the 1974 Act. Therefore, to talk about returning to that method, in the way that the Secretary of State has done today, is enormously depressing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked the Secretary of State about the provisions of the 1974 Act and whether they would still apply if and when the Bill became law. Will there be some guarantee from the Secretary of State—not from someone whom he has appointed as franchising director—about the size of the network? Is it still the Government's intention that the 11,000 miles, to which my hon. Friend referred, should remain in situ, to be the railway of the future, as it has been over the past 20 years or so?

Given the view expressed by the Secretary of State and the Conservative party's general ideological view that the private sector is inherently good and the public sector inherently bad, what guarantee can the Secretary of State give us that any moneys allocated through the person whom he appoints will be fairly divided and will not go largely to the new private franchises at the expense of the rump railway operating in the public sector, at least until the unlikely day when the right hon. Gentleman can find someone to take it off our hands? What guarantee can he give us that the railways still operated by British Rail, albeit in the short term as the Government intend, will be properly treated in the allocation of funds?

Ministers trot out the phrase "value for money" all the time. All of us, even Conservative Members who support the Bill, know full well that franchises will be awarded to the lowest bidder. In those circumstances, there is no real guarantee of value for money. If the franchisee runs half a dozen trains during a day at a time that suits him or her, he or she will be able to put in a far lower bid than someone who wants to run a comprehensive day and evening service. Without some guarantee—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) says something incoherent. If he has a point to make, I shall be delighted to give way.

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): The hon. Gentleman is obviously unaware that potential franchisees will be invited to bid for specified timetables. They will not be able to pick and choose which services they deliver.

Mr. Snape: Although the hon. Gentleman has not been here long, his naivety does him no credit. Does he seriously think that there is any long-term guarantee of railway services on that basis?

Mr. Luff: Yes.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman says, "Yes." He and I will debate these matters in a television studio at the weekend. I am looking forward to that immensely. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East says, it is no wonder that the Secretary of State will not appear in a television studio. None of us is surprised if he sends along people such as the hon. Member for Worcester.

No real value-for-money judgment can be made about the proposals. The Secretary of State and his more emollient colleague, the Minister for Public Transport, have given us no guarantees. I hope that before the House comes to a conclusion on the new clause, guarantees are not only sought, but given.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I do not subscribe to the view that the railway is badly managed. I am the holder of an Industry and Parliament Trust fellowship and in the short time in which I have held that fellowship I have met many senior and middle-level managers of British Rail. I have been impressed by the people whom I have met; they are excellent, dedicated people. However, no one in the

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

country, even in the railway industry itself, believes that there is no scope for improvement. I have no difficulty, therefore, with the principle of introducing private sector management techniques into the railway industry. The people who work in the industry have no difficulty with that principle either.

I also have no difficulty with the desire to introduce private sector capital into the railway industry. The trouble with publicly funded industries, as we saw with water and electricity, is that there is only one source of money—the Treasury. The Treasury usually has only one word in its vocabulary, which is no. Especially in the case of industries such as the railways, one is always told by the Treasury that hospitals, schools and other areas have a far greater priority.

I have difficulty, however, with the implementation of the process. The privatisation of the railway industry proposed in the Bill is a very ambitious project and there is no doubt that there will be teething troubles. I ask my right hon. Friend, therefore, for an assurance that the privatisation process will be conducted on a step-by-step basis and that we shall learn from the errors that will inevitably be shown up when implementation begins. I ask my right hon. Friend for an assurance that we shall not rush headlong into anything.

Mr. MacGregor: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall respond quickly to the points raised. The reason why the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East and I were yesterday in the same studio, but discussing the matter separately, is that in the short time allotted to us we should have been talking very fast at each other. It was probably more productive for the distinguished interviewer to bring out separately different aspects of our policy. The hon. Gentleman knows very well that we have had many debates on these matters and I am sure that we shall have many more on transport matters for a long time to come.

My hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) made two good points, with which I entirely agree, about the present BR management. I know that many BR managers see great opportunities to produce better passenger services through the proposed systems. My hon. Friend also made a good point about private capital.

I have always emphasised that this is an evolutionary reform of the railways in a private sector direction; it is not revolutionary reform and will not happen all at once. I pray in aid a leader in the *Financial Times* today which my hon. Friend may have seen. It suggests that we should go faster than we are. It says:

> "All the private sector is being asked to do is to bid for franchises to operate passenger services on British Rail's behalf. But even this small step brings the prospect of significant benefits—worthwhile improvements in productivity, a management motivated by financial rewards, and, it is to be hoped, the beginning of private sector investment in rolling stock. And because the chosen structure sensibly avoids a 'big bang' approach in favour of a piecemeal allocation of franchises over a period of years, there will be every opportunity to learn from experience as privatisation progresses."

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): At the expense of passengers.

Mr. MacGregor: Certainly not at the expense of passengers. I hope that that meets my hon. Friend's point. We shall benefit all the way through from better and better handling of the whole system.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): This is the second time that the Secretary of State has referred to this morning's *Financial Times* editorial. In the interest of balance, every time that he quotes from today's *Financial Times* editorial, will he also quote from last week's editorial in *The Daily Telegraph*, or is *The Daily Telegraph* no longer an acceptable journal of opinion for the Conservative party?

Mr. MacGregor: The reason why I am quoting from the *Financial Times* is that an Opposition Member raised its editorial. I simply thought that the *Financial Times* put the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham made extremely well.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to Glasgow and I can give him a clear affirmative on that point for two reasons. First, British Rail has no plans to discontinue any services beyond Preston on the west coast main line. Secondly, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the invitation to tender will be based on the network as it exists immediately before that invitation.

That is very clear. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will see that that is the case from the chart that has been produced today for that franchise unit. I can see that there are real merits in having competition under our franchising system between individual operators and between the west coast and east coast main lines.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East referred to cross-subsidies. Under the system that we are proposing, where a line like the east coast main line has received substantial investment and where bidders are therefore likely to pay a premium in return from the profits which, as the hon. Gentleman indicated, are available on that line, that premium will be able to be offset—in effect, it will be taken into the calculation—against the total amount of subsidy that will be paid out in the bids for other franchises such as for the west coast main line where, I readily acknowledge, further investment on a significant scale will be required over the years.

That brings me to the next and very important point about PSO grants. We are continuing the subsidies. We believe that we have found a more effective way, in operational terms in respect of getting value for money, and in transparency, by allocating the subsidies in the way that we propose. However, the subsidies will continue.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East also referred to inadequate finances, although he conceded that the current level of PSO is twice the level of recent years. He will be aware that the currrent level is much higher than for a very long time—*[Interruption.]* That was the hon. Gentleman's phrase. That is also why investment is at such a high level, including £500 million which has been spent on safety in the past three years.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I must make progress.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East will also be aware that we have given clear commitments in relation to safety on the basis of the Health and Safety Executive report. This debate comes down to whether the subsidies are allocated through two different routes or

through one. I have already said why I believe that it is right to proceed via the franchising director. I do not want to repeat the arguments, but that is why I commend new clause 16 and urge the House to reject the other new clause.

Mr. Wilson: If the Secretary of State had given way a moment ago, I would not have needed to intervene now as I wish to contribute literally three sentences. The PSO grant has been cut by 23 per cent. over last year's figure. Even according to the somewhat short-term thinking of the Conservative party these days, I do not believe that that counts as a very long time.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 4

DUTY OF CERTAIN PERSONS TO FURNISH INFORMATION TO THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR ON REQUEST

'.—(1) Any of the following persons, that is to say—

(a) the Board,

(b) any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board, or

(c) any person who is the holder of a network licence or a station licence,

shall be under a duty to furnish to the Franchising Director in such form and manner as he may by notice request such information as he may so request, being information which the Franchising Director considers necessary for the purpose of facilitating the performance of any function of his under this Part.

(2) A request under subsection (1) above must be complied with within such time (being not less than 28 days from the making of the request) as may be specified in the request.

(3) If any such request is not complied with, the Franchising Director may serve a notice under subsection (4) below on the person from whom the information was requested under subsection (1) above.

(4) A notice under this subsection is a notice signed by the Franchising Director and—

(a) requiring the person on whom it is served to produce, at a time and place specified in the notice, to the Franchising Director or to any person appointed by the Franchising Director for the purpose, any documents which are specified or described in the notice and are in that person's custody or under his control; or

(b) requiring that person to furnish, at a time and place and in the form and manner specified in the notice, to the Franchising Director such information as may be specified or described in the notice.

(5) No person shall be required under this section to produce any documents which he could not be compelled to produce in civil proceedings in the court or, in complying with any requirement for the furnishing of information, to give any information which he could not be compelled to give in evidence in any such proceedings.

(6) A person who without reasonable excuse fails to do anything required of him by notice under subsection (4) above is guilty of an offence and shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.

(7) A person who intentionally alters, suppresses or destroys any document which he has been required by any notice under subsection (4) above to produce is guilty of an offence and shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.

(8) If a person makes default in complying with a notice under subsection (4) above, the court may, on the application of the Franchising Director, make such order as the court thinks fit for requiring the default to be made good; and any such order may provide that all the costs or expenses of and incidental to the application shall be borne by the person in default or by any officers of a company or other association who are responsible for its default.

(9) Any reference in this section to the production of a document includes a reference to the production of a legible and intelligible copy of information recorded otherwise than in legible form; and the reference to suppressing a document includes a reference to destroying the means of reproducing information recorded otherwise than in legible form.

(10) In this section "the court" means the High Court, in relation to England and Wales, and the Court of Session, in relation to Scotland.'—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 13—*Transfers of franchise assets and shares.*

Government new clause 23—*Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes.*

Amendment (a) to new clause 23, in line 7, at end insert —

', or

(d) the Board, or any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board'.

Amendment No. 237, in clause 5, page 6, line 9, at end insert—

'(c) to ensure that the levels of fares charged or to be charged under a franchise agreement are reasonable to passengers'.

Government amendments Nos. 110 to 112, 153, 162, 13, 166, 164, 165, 168 to 172, 174, 179, 177, 180 to 182, 184, 72, 80, 85 to 88, and 24 to 28.

Mr. Freeman: I will speak to new clause 4 and the other Government new clauses of which there are a great number. I will explain relatively simply what they are intended to do. They all relate to the powers of the franchising director.

Government new clauses 4 and 13 replace clause 68. They improve the drafting of the Bill. They extend the powers of the franchising director in obtaining information to a much wider range of bodies. At the moment, clause 68 specifically gives the franchising director power to obtain information from BR to prepare information for a bid for a franchise.

New clauses 4 and 13 extend the powers of the franchising director to obtain information from Railtrack and from station licensees to prepare the necessary information to advertise to the private sector what is on offer in terms of a franchise. That will enable the franchising director to prepare proper information. There will certainly be sufficient time for the private sector to bid for the franchise.

8.15 pm

Clause 24 is replaced by Government new clauses 13 and 23. The purpose of those new clauses is to give the franchising director powers of designation, protection and transfer of what are called designated franchise assets. The new clauses provide, in the Government's judgment, a clearer regime. In particular, for the first time, the franchising director will be able to designate leases of rolling stock. As those are clearly rights of the operating companies and assets which do not belong to the

franchisee or potential franchisee, the franchising director will have the power to control the continued use of leased rolling stock on a particular line.

An amendment to which we shall come later should be read in conjunction with that new power. It gives the franchising director the right to roll forward leased rolling stock from one franchise to another. The purpose of that amendment is to enable the leasing industry to have sufficient security in writing long-term leases, even though a particular franchise might be for a more limited period.

Under those Government new clauses, the franchising director will be able to designate assets, rights and liabilities. The new clauses also provide for designation of those franchise assets by agreement with the franchisee. We believe that that is important. They will be protected under the franchise and there are provisions in relation to assets, removed at the end of a franchise period from one franchisee and passed to the next, for appropriate values to be paid to the franchisee at the conclusion of his franchise. There is also a provision which places on a statutory footing the obligation of the franchisee not to encumber certain assets.

I hope that that is a concise introduction to the amendments.

Mr. Cryer: Before the Minister concludes, will he describe the circumstances in which the franchising director is given powers in new clause 4 to impose criminal penalties, albeit through the courts? The power will apply if a person fails to provide adequate notice or if he or she alters documents. Does not that suggest that the proposed system is fraught with legal difficulties, arguments and deceit? New clause 4 provides for the standard of production in civil proceedings and it adds on criminal offences. Does not that envisage serious difficulties in the work of the franchising director?

Mr. Freeman: I do not think so. The hon. Gentleman will realise that the franchising director is established as a non-ministerial Government Department, answerable to the House through my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Therefore, he constitutes a public body. It his duty to let by franchise the responsibility for running passenger rail services. Therefore, there should be some compulsion available to him to obtain information. We are not simply talking about BR or Railtrack—and it is intended that Railtrack shall be a Government-owned company. There may also be private providers of infrastructure and, for example, private sector station licensees.

If the franchising director needs to obtain information to enable him to relet a franchise—or to let one initially—it should be within his powers to obtain that information. That is the reason for the sanctions in Government new clause 4, to which the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has drawn the attention of the House. He was right to do so. That does not imply that there is any web of deceit or malevolence among those who seek to provide station services, network services or franchised passenger rolling stock services. It gives the franchising director the essential power that he needs.

I note that the group of amendments includes amendment (a) to new clause 23. I am sure we shall hear a speech on it shortly from the Liberal Democrat Benches. It is important that the House should recognise that it is not intended that British Rail should have any determinate length of responsibility for running franchise services once an initial franchise is let.

As I understand it—I look forward to responding in due course—amendment (a) to new clause 23 provides the power to transfer assets from the franchising director to British Rail for a period to run services if the franchising director decides that that is the best solution. I look forward to hearing the arguments. I shall argue that the franchising director will look to British Rail in certain circumstances. But the franchising director can and will make management arrangements with British Rail to provide the services. There is no need to give British Rail either a formal franchise or for there to be a formal arrangement between the franchising director and British Rail.

Mr. Wilson: We have here a preliminary skirmish on some of the issues that we will return to in more detail during tomorrow's debate. As the Minister said, these new clauses and amendments are to some extent technical. Some piquancy has been introduced to the group of amendments by the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on fares and the franchising director's role in that, and also of course by the hon. Member for, North Devon (Mr. Harvey) who has raised the subject of British Rail's right to do anything after the legislation is passed, if it is passed in its present form.

The amendments also give rise to some discussion of the powers of the franchising director. I see the director as a figure who will be of great convenience to the Government, in that responsibility for everything that happens on the railways will then be transferred to him. The Government are looking for a figure of whom they can say, "It is nothing to do with us. This is the franchising director's job. It is he who has made the decisions and the idea of holding Ministers responsible really is quite ridiculous."

I can tell the Minister that the Government will not get away with that. The creation of the structure is the responsibility of the Government. When things start to go wrong—as they certainly will for the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) outlined in the previous debate and for the reasons that we can see in this debate—I assure him that it will be political responsibility that is carried. It will not be the franchising director who does not have the money to sustain the system. It will not be the franchising director's fault when franchises fail and such measures have to be brought into play.

There are things that we can welcome. If the legislation goes ahead, clearly it would create additional difficulties if every time that a franchisee changed, it was all change for rolling stock and everything else. As the principle of leasing, which is a far more rational and intelligent form of private sector involvement than anything that we have heard from the Government, was first suggested by the Opposition, it would be illogical of us to oppose the idea that leasing should be made possible by a recognition that the leased rolling stock would carry over from one franchise period to the other. However, that does not acknowledge the sense of franchise periods. That is a separate story.

We support leasing. It is a sensible way of creating investment in the railways. It is a sensible way of giving

work to the railway manufacturing industries. Of course, leasing could have been introduced years ago. It is not in the least dependent on anything else in the Bill. It is remarkable that the Government took so long to come round to our way of thinking.

The rest of the new clauses and amendments are not controversial. We support the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling. We also support the Liberal Democrat amendment, on which we shall vote later. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling and his colleagues suggest that the franchise director should have a responsibility

"to ensure that the levels of fares charged or to be charged under a franchise agreement are reasonable to passengers".

I have no wish to pre-empt what the hon. Gentleman intends to say, but if the Government do not accept the amendment as a signpost that many Conservative Members are extremely discontent with the Bill, they will not accept much else.

It is surely reasonable to expect the franchise director to have responsibility and take an interest in the level of fares charged by the operators. All the pressures in the Bill will be to force fares upwards. The financial regime which will be put in place will force fares upwards. The main pressure will come from the profit element, but the structure will depend largely on the level of subsidy. There is no guarantee that in future the subsidy will be maintained at its present rate. Indeed, we believe that a large part of the Government's operation is intended to reduce that level of subsidy, and hence the cost of the railways to the Government..

The Liberal Democrat amendment, which will also have our support, is straightforward. It raises the principle of involvement of British Rail in what happens after the legislation is passed, if indeed it is. The franchise director can apparently transfer assets to virtually anyone in Christendom except the people who at present run the railways. Here we see the Government's prejudice against British Rail. It is further confirmation that the purpose of the Bill is to squeeze British Rail out of existence. The Government intend to erode it steadily. Prejudice is the only word that I can use because it is difficult to see any rationale behind the Government's position.

The Minister's attitude to the Liberal Democrat amendment seems to confirm that anything which sustains or extends British Rail's role is anathema to Ministers. We shall deal with that approach in much more detail tomorrow. The tone of the Minister's remarks must be offensive to some Conservative Members. It will certainly be offensive to people in British Rail who work to make the system function as well as it does. The blinkered focus of so much of the legislation is that British Rail must be squeezed out of existence by whatever means possible.

Like the Minister, I hope that I can catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I give notice that we shall support the amendments. I look forward to much more discussion of the principles which underlie them as we proceed.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I wish to put four questions to the Minister. I think that they are relevant to the new clauses. I appreciate that many hon. Members wish to speak. New clause 4 says that any person shall furnish information. Does that information relate to nationality? I was astonished, as I know that you will be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to hear that while foreign railway companies such as the French or Belgian railway network will be permitted to put in a bid for the Fenchurch Street line, British Rail will not.

I find it unthinkable that British Rail might be able to tender for the Fenchurch Street line only by securing a French subsidiary company. I hope that the Minister will bear in mind our obligations under European Community law, and will ensure that no one is treated unfairly. I hope that he can assure us either that national railway companies will be able to put in a bid, or that they will not. I think he will accept that it would be rather unfair to the people of Southend, and rather alarming for them, if they were subject to control by a French company rather than by British Rail—for which they have a high regard, despite the dreadful service with which they are provided.

8.30 pm

My second point is fundamental. Can the Government assure us that, when the franchises and information are sought, the people—including hon. Members—will be able to see what is being asked for? I think that, if the franchising director decides that he wants the Fenchurch Street line to have two trains—perhaps on Wednesday, every second week—the people of Southend are entitled to have that information. I hope that the Minister will make it abundantly clear that, if the franchising director is looking for bids, the people will know what is being paid for. As he probably knows, there is a certain amount of suspicion about the whole business in some parts of the country.

Thirdly, can the Minister give an assurance that the franchising director will consult the respected rail passenger organisations in Southend and elsewhere? The Government now seem to be setting up quangos constantly. I remember a time when Conservatives used to complain about quangos, describing them as nasty, costly nonsenses created by socialist Governments. In fact, we have set up far more quangos than any socialist Government, and they are becoming more expensive and more bureaucratic. When I look around my own country —including a place called Chelmsford, which some hon. Members may have observed—I find that many people are employed by quangos, and that it costs a fortune. It is all very sad.

I have a high regard for the Minister, and I know that there is no way of preventing the Government from rushing to create a mass of new quangos. I hope, however, that he will at least assure us that the exciting new quango known as the franchising director will have an obligation to consult rail users' associations.

Finally, let me convey a simple request from Southend-on-Sea. Our rail system is wildly out of date. Let me pay a personal tribute to the Minister, along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon): he agreed to new signalling equipment for the line. It is only fair to point out that the signalling at Fenchurch Street station is older than I am: that shows that it is rather out of date. However, we have now been assured that something will be done—and we hope that it will, despite the problems facing the Treasury. My right hon. Friend and I—along with all the travellers of Southend—also hope that this exciting new arrangement will ensure the provision of new rolling stock on the Fenchurch Street line.

We respect the Minister. He has said things that we have found to be correct, which is rather unusual in

Ministers nowadays; he has forecast developments that have actually come about—which, again, is commendable and unusual. Given our trust in the Minister, based on what he has done for us in the past, we hope that he can answer the four points that I have made. If he can, it will greatly reassure the people of Southend, who have suffered a great deal and who hope that the Government's exciting new plan will limit their sufferings in the future.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): The Minister anticipated that I would want to speak to amendment (a), and I intend to do so. The new clause strays further into the realm of BR's future involvement in the railways, which will clearly be a substantial matter for debate tomorrow.

Only a few minutes ago, we were considering Government new clause 16 and the principle of BR running services that are not franchised—that is, operating services before the creation of a franchise. I wonder why it should be so out of the question for us to discuss BR's involvement after the ending of a franchise. It strikes me as the height of absurdity that, under Government new clause 23(1)(b), the franchising director will apparently have to go to the lengths of setting up his own subsidiary company to run services where there will be no other franchise. As the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) pointed out, that rules out the obvious party to which the franchising director should turn in such circumstances—the only experienced operator in the land, British Rail.

The amendment would not set up a formal BR bidding process at the end of a private franchise. There would be no obligation to hand everything over to British Rail; that would simply be retained as an option, at the franchising director's discretion. The experience of London Buses is vaguely comparable to what we are discussing. In some cases, at the end of a private franchise, the service has reverted to London Buses.

I agree with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North: the Government's proposals are based on ideology —on a dogmatic determination to squeeze BR out of existence. If, at the end of a franchise, it is decided that there will not be another franchise for some reason, and the franchising director contemplates handing over the service to BR—the Minister has conceded that that could be done on the basis of, for instance, a management agreement—it must be because something is wrong.

The fact that the existing franchisee is not coming back for more, or there is no queue of potential franchisees waiting to take over, suggests that the franchise is failing. In such circumstances, the option—the right—to hand the service to British Rail would be a valuable tool in the franchising director's armoury.

If, as has been suggested, that could be done simply through management agreements, why not write it into the new clause and enable the assets to be handed over? How, through a management agreement, can BR run a service without being given the franchise assets—the trains and everthing else on the line? How can any management agreement cover BR's ability to operate such a service if it is not given the tools with which to do so?

I admire the conviction with which the Government are planning ahead—burning the bridges behind them; doing without any safety mechanism to catch the pieces if the whole thing falls apart—but I am forced to doubt their judgment. They are impressively buoyant in their approach to a scheme that is almost universally derided by those outside their ranks.

The Government believe that the introduction of the private sector through the franchising set-up that they anticipate will result in a reduction in the cost to the Exchequer; but many of us do not. They believe that a queue of interested parties is champing at the bit to take on these services; but many of us do not. They believe that the private sector whizz kids will come in, improving services and increasing revenue; again, many of us do not. The Minister himself has agreed that, if the private sector is unable to come in and increase the revenue, there will be a disaster. How right he is.

At present, none of us knows who is right. No one can say for certain whether the Government, in their buoyancy, conviction and optimism, are right, or whether the many others who have considered these matters and retain some scepticism are right. Let us just suppose that it is we who are right—we who are sceptical about the potential success of the scheme—and that franchises start to fail. If one private franchise fails, why should another on the same line and service succeed? What would happen if nobody came forward to take it over?

If the amount that the franchise director has to offer to try to tempt people in to save the day in those sorry circumstances is more than it would cost British Rail to run the service, the National Audit Office will probably take an interest in the matter, as it would amount to the squandering of public funds. It would be in the best interests of the Minister and the scheme if that fallback option and safety net could be continued. I sincerely believe that the Government are displaying pig-headed obstinacy and that the British Rail option should remain available to the franchise director.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): I wish to speak to amendment No. 237. Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to express my appreciation to Madam Speaker for selecting the amendment at a late stage. I believe that it is extremely important for the House to discuss the amendment, and Madam Speaker has done the House a service by enabling hon. Members to debate fares policy.

As the House may know, I expressed strong reservations on Second Reading about the effects on fares of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's British Rail privatisation proposals. My fears were based on a combination of three factors, which all appeared to me to show that a strong upward pressure on fares would be created. The first was that the private sector franchisees would certainly look for a significantly higher rate of return than is currently being obtained by British Rail and is being sought by the Treasury as a rate of return on capital by British Rail.

Secondly, there is no certainty about the level at which present subsidies will be continued for British Rail, particularly in relation to Network SouthEast. The Government have made a commitment that subsidies will continue, but have declined to say at what financial level. The subsidies might be cut by half, two thirds or three quarters, which would result in further upward pressure on fares. Thirdly, the Bill does not contain a specific provision to moderate the level of fares that can be set under the franchise proposals.

Since I expressed those concerns on Second Reading —concerns that were also expressed in other parts of the House and by a number of hon. Members—there has been remarkable agreement in the comments on the fare implications of the proposals. The House has had the benefit of the Select Committee report, which expressed a similar view.

Outside the House, there has been a host of reports by independent firms, consultancies, independent commentators, transport user groups, consumer interests, including the National Consumer Council, and major local authority associations such as the Association of District Councils, the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. They have all come to the same conclusion: that the pressure on fares will tend to be upwards. Against that background, I urge my right hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to give the most serious consideration to that substantial weight of opinion from all quarters on the proposals' likely fare implications.

8.45 pm

I tabled amendment No. 237 because, although the Bill has now reached its Report stage, there is still no sign of material moves by Ministers to allay my fears on the fares issue. I had hoped that, in Committee, the concerns that I had expressed on Second Reading would be at least partly met, but unhappily that is not so.

Since I spoke on Second Reading, there have been two policy announcements. At virtually the eleventh hour and 59th minute of the Second Reading debate, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport popped into his wind-up speech a significant statement of policy. I believe that it appeared there for the first time, unless it had previously escaped me. He said:

"We propose a cap on fares for those services which are a monopoly, and I can confirm that the commuting lines into London constitute a monopoly."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 1993; Vol. 218, c. 243.]

That constituted acceptance of the principle of a cap.

Tucked away in the voluminous documentation submitted to the Standing Committee was a paper entitled, "Draft Objectives of the Secretary of State for the Franchising Director". It contained two paragraphs with the arresting title of "Fare Levels", setting out the draft objectives. But, unfortunately, they contained nothing of great substance, other than stating that only on franchise services which enjoy significant market power—monopolies—could the franchise agreements limit price increases on fares. No such limits would apply on other lines.

To determine whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State could say anything more substantial about what he intended to do in relation to fares, I asked key questions about capping: at what level could the cap on fares be set and what would be the criteria for triggering the cap on fares where the franchisee had a monopoly? I also asked whether my right hon. Friend had any further information to supplement the thin information set out in the two paragraphs of the draft objectives to which I have referred. My hon. Friend the Minister replied:

"Further work remains to be done in developing the draft guidance that I provided to the Standing Committee in relation to fares regulation and other matters."—[*Official Report*, 5 May 1993; Vol. 224, c. *158*.]

We are none the wiser about what is intended in the way of fare control.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): While I clearly welcome the fact that commuter lines into London are to be regarded as a monopoly, and will consequently be eligible for capping, does my right hon. Friend agree that there are many other cases all over the country in which, in railway terms, the franchisee will have a monopoly?

Sir John Stanley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes a significant point. In practice, it will be extremely difficult to ring-fence the capping principle on a geographical basis. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister will appreciate the force of what my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) has said.

On Second Reading, I said that I felt that I was being asked to sign a blank cheque on my constituents' cheque books for their travel-to-work costs—the second highest item of household expenditure in my constituency after food, runing at about £2,000 per year. The object of amendment No. 237 is to try to place an upper limit on the blank cheque by introducing the principle of reasonableness, inserting in clause 5 an additional statutory duty on the franchising director.

The House may find it interesting to look at the franchising director's existing statutory duties. In many ways, the first two duties are symptomatic of how the Bill is drafted, as they simply put clear obligations on the franchising director to do what the Secretary of State tells him. In other words, the franchising director will follow only the Secretary of State's objectives, guidelines and instructions. Indeed, he is a creature of the Secretary of State.

That is a perfectly reasonable principle, and I do not contest it. But that is where it ends—no further obligation whatever is placed on the franchising director, other than to do what the Secretary of State says. The purpose of the amendment is to introduce an additional statutory duty —the requirement that the level of fares set should be reasonable to passengers.

I anticipate two possible questions that may be asked with regard to it. The first is whether it is technically and legally satisfactory to base a duty on the principle of reasonableness. I submit that there are ample precedents in statute law, and that it is a familiar legal concept. Obviously, in considering the amendment, I and those associated with it considered other options, such as whether there was a possible formula that could be adopted. We concluded that, given the multiplicity of lines, the different financial patterns and the different social requirements, there was no formula that could conceivably make sense and that therefore the criterion of reasonableness was the best one to adopt.

The second question that I anticipate is whether such an amendment is necessary: is the point that I am making covered elsewhere in the Bill? If my hon. Friend the Minister seeks to draw attention, for example, to clause 4(1)(a), which refers to the statutory duties of the Secretary of State and the regulator, there is a statutory duty

"to protect the interests of users of railway services".

That statutory duty is not sufficient to deal with the specific issue of fares—it is an extremely generalised duty.

Indeed, from some standpoints, one could well argue in favour of a substantial increase in fares, possibly in the interests of users of rail services in certain circumstances —for example, if a major investment programme had to

[Sir John Stanley]

take place. I do not believe that the statutory duty in clause 4 in any way provides an adequate answer to the question of protection in the area of fares.

My hon. Friend may seek to draw my attention to amendment No. 111. I appreciate that that amendment enables a franchising agreement to include provisions on fares, but their content is left wholly open and could amount to anything. Therefore, the specific legal point, the specific policy and the specific structure in law that is covered by my amendment is not in any way covered elsewhere in the legislation. If the amendment is accepted by the House—obviously, I hope that it will be—it will be the only specific wording in the legislation biting on fare levels.

The amendment could not be a wrecking amendment. It does not in any way seek to undermine the Government's proposals or stop franchising getting off the ground. It is based entirely on reasonableness.

I put it to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that the only conceivable basis for failing to accept such an amendment is that they wish to keep open the option of fare levels becoming unreasonable. I assume and hope that that is not what they wish to do. The amendment is modest, sensible and necessary, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Snape: As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said, we must pay tribute to the Government for one thing—they have accepted the principle of rolling stock leasing. Before the last general election, they were resolutely against rolling stock leasing. Indeed, during the campaign and for several months after it, the Minister of State said—I do not recall whether it was in the House or outside—that the Labour party's proposal on the leasing of rolling stock was impractical. It is a pleasure to see him, albeit from an odd angle, standing on his head at the Dispatch Box.

For some time, Labour Members have felt that the leasing of rolling stock was sensible because it would allow the newly formed leasing companies to raise private capital for new trains without having an impact on the external financing limits of the railway system. When we put that point to the Government, as we have done in the past few years, we were scorned, so we are delighted that yet another Labour party policy has finally been accepted by the Government.

I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who has some reason for not being in his place at present. I appreciate the British Rail versus the SNCF argument. Generally, the hon. Gentleman is not overly keen on foreigners—he has made that plain in many debates in the House. He did not go so far as to imply that the employees of SNCF would trundle up and down through Fenchurch Street station and on to Southend wearing striped jerseys and berets and reeking of onions or garlic, but one got the general drift that he was not overly keen on the prospect of the French railway system intervening or operating trains in his part of the world.

When one looks at the comparative efficiency of British Rail and SNCF, the illogical nature of the legislation strikes one because the Government have admitted that BR's productivity and ability to run a railway system have recently improved dramatically and, indeed, by any benchmark exceed that of SNCF. However, not only will BR not be allowed to bid for railway franchises, but, in the event of a franchisee not renewing his franchise or going bust during the period of the franchise, British Rail will not be allowed to take over. Yet we have heard from Ministers that a less efficient, foreign-owned railway system will be allowed to take over. It is a rum form of Toryism. I always thought that Toryism was a fairly rum creed, but it gets rummer the more one looks at the proposals in the legislation.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) understandably expressed concern about the likely impact of the proposals on fares in his constituency and on Network SouthEast. He is right to express that concern because it is the Government's intention to reduce and eventually eliminate subsidies to Network SouthEast commuter trains by 1995. It is no wonder that the right hon. Gentleman is concerned. He has a reputation of being the ultimate Thatcherite in his younger days. However, like most other Thatcherites, he is not overly keen on the plunge in the cold bath of reality when it affects his constituency or—as subsidies are likely to be reduced or eliminated by 1995—his re-election prospects. If the subsidy to Network SouthEast has been abolished by that time, it will at least provide Conservative Members with a ready talking point on the doorsteps during the next election campaign.

It is acknowledged, not least in the latest report on rail privatisation by the consultants Steer Davies Gleave, that fares on Network SouthEast would have to rise by 37 per cent., presumably by 1995, if the Government's intention to withdraw the subsidy were realised. I understand the concern of the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling and I appreciate the thinking and the feeling behind his amendment. I am not sure whether he has got the right person to whom to appeal for a ruling on the reasonableness or otherwise of the proposed fare rises, given the Government's intention and the duties of the franchising director to allocate routes depending on the quality and level of bids. Is the franchising director the right person to decide on the reasonableness of those fare increases? The right hon. Gentleman might consider the regulator a more suitable person.

9 pm

Not only is it politically reckless for the Government to present such proposals, but they will add considerably to the congestion on south-eastern roads and make it more difficult for Tory Members to be re-elected. That last point will not cause me to lose much sleep, although it is obviously disturbing to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling, whose amendment is in this group.

Is it logical to stand by while the increases illustrated by Steer Davies Gleave are implemented? Given the Government's intention to abolish the subsidies, perhaps the Minister of State will tell us whether he thinks that the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling is reasonable.

The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) also said that the proposed legislation was nonsense. He mentioned the refusal to countenance the idea of the expert at running trains, British Rail, taking over a franchise. That is not fair to the management of BR. When I worked at BR, there were good and bad managers and the campaign of denigrating BR management has had an

enormous impact on managerial morale. To suggest that people are effective as managers only if they mortgage their homes to put together a buy-out is as insulting as it is untrue. The Minister of State should look again at the whole issue of BR's managerial involvement. If the legislation is implemented with its provisions unscathed, there will be a further deterioration of managerial morale in the railways and the consequences of that will be borne by all our constituents.

The Minister should reply to the issues raised by the hon. Member for North Devon. I welcome the Minister's conversion to the principle of leasing rolling stock, but the amendments address many matters that are eminently unsatisfactory.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): I apologise to the House for not being here at the beginning of the debate. The issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and I wish to raise are more apposite to the ammendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) than to some others.

My second apology is to my hon. Friend the Minister of State. It is never wise for ex-Secretaries of State to return to issues after they have been away from them for a few years. They are clearly out of date and probably have everything wrong. No doubt the Minister will politely correct me if I make some mistakes.

I am strongly in favour of the Bill and I hope that I am not the only hon. Member who takes that view. If I were not strongly in favour, I would certainly have landed the Government with a poisoned chalice. Perhaps I have done that. The Bill will bring long-term benefits to my constituents and to rail travellers in my constituency. *[Interruption.]* I intend to deal not with the macro side but with some of the small problems in my part of the world. I used to have to deal with the macro side and it is a great relief not to have to do that any more.

The point that some of my constituents raise with me is that, although they know perfectly well that over the past 50 years or so their service to London has left a great deal to be desired, they are alarmed by what is proposed in the Bill because they want to hold on to nurse for fear of getting something worse. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, when he considers the points raised by me and by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East, will consider how we can reassure them—because they are eminently reassurable.

I believe that, before the franchises are awarded, it is important to consult those people in the local community who have strong views and some experience of how those rail services are or should be run. That is why I strongly believe that there should be some form of consultation or discussion with the local railway travellers' associations and perhaps with the consultative committees, so that those who are the leaders on this issue in my constituency —and, no doubt, many others—can be seized of the merits of the case. They will know why Mr. X has become one of the franchisers rather than Mr. Y and what criteria have led the Government or the franchising director to that decision. Such people should know some of the contents of the franchise—perhaps some things will be commercially confidential and will not be able to be revealed, but there will be some things that can easily be revealed. That would go a long way, at the beginning, towards reassuring people who are nervous about what might take place.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling raised in his powerful speech the most important issue of all—fares. I respect and believe the assurances given by my right hon. and hon. Friends, during the passage of the Bill and before, about what will happen to fares on commuter lines if the new system is adopted. I am not particularly worried about that because I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends will make sure that, on fares, nothing dreadful happens to my constituents. If something dreadful does happen, not only my seat but several hundred seats around London will be lost. The Government would be foolish to try it, so I am confident about that.

It is not surprising that representatives of the commuters in my area, who do not have the experience or the pleasure of knowing my right hon. and hon. Friends as well as I do, are naturally nervous about the matter. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling outlined their anxieties, quite rightly, a few moments ago. I endorse everything that he said, and that may reassure one or two hon. Members who are nervous about some aspects of the Bill.

I would ask my hon. Friend the Minister, when he winds up, to give careful consideration to trying to make sure that, when the changes take place, local people are fully consulted so that they know what they are in for and it does not come as a tremendous surprise. I think that they will find that they are very pleased with what will happen to them when the franchising takes place—that is the Government's intention and my intention, and I am sure it will be achieved—but they need to be helped, reassured and encouraged.

I would echo the tributes paid to my hon. Friend the Minister. He has paid several visits to my constituency, ridden on the notorious misery line, and lived to tell the tale. He does not look too bad for having done so. I, too, have done so, and I can say that in recent months the line has got a great deal better. There is a considerable local problem, but I believe that franchising the service is likely to improve the position.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to give sympathetic consideration to the need to consult people, to take note of their views—in particular, the local railway travellers' association—and to give careful consideration to them before the franchises are awarded.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Much of the press comment on the Bill recognises that it creates a new class of endangered species—that of the railways system and its dependants. Many of the amendments tabled for consideration seek to protect those dependants. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has moved an amendment which clearly seeks to protect passengers and the reference to the consultative system is again an attempt to protect passengers.

Other amendments will be moved which seek to protect freight users, lines from closure and employees—we have already had a debate about protecting employees. I suspect that the Government know well that many aspects of the railway system are seriously threatened by the Bill. The Minister commented on leased rolling stock, which is also affected by new clauses 13, 14 and 18, an issue that we must consider fully, and that has been raised several times in the debate.

New clause 4, on the duty to furnish information, does not specify what information it is expected will be

[Mr. John Gunnell]

required. Let me suggest to the Minister the information that I think should be known to the franchising director. He should have a view on the historic costs of every service going out to franchise. That view should also be made available to the public. When services are to continue and support is offered by the franchising director, it is important to know what the cost of those services is now so that comparison may be drawn between the cost of the services run by British Rail and the anticipated cost under a franchising system.

That information is necessary because the invitation to tender, which comes from the franchising director, must contain the best available information so that bidders can respond appropriately, bring forward cost-effective proposals and have an idea as to about where their bid should be pitched. We do not expect that there will be an excessive number of bidders. It is clear that there are likely to be few and only a few services may go out to franchise in the first instance. It is important that we set down and make public the costs and that they form part of the tendering process. It is also important that the franchising director has information on aspects of the track so that he is able to inform Railtrack of where new investment will be necessary. He will have to have much information that will need to be disclosed.

Amendment No. 237, to which the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling spoke, concerns the fare levels that will be required and imposed. They will be affected by the amount that the franchising director is willing to pay for services. He will make a judgment about fares if he knows the current usage and costs of operating that line. He will be able to set the subsidy, which will enable bidders to draw a relationship between the passenger throughput and the possible rate of return on investment. It is important not only that his judgments are based on information, which he can obtain through new clause 4, but that that information is given to the public.

Rolling stock was mentioned in the debate that preceded Second Reading and on Second Reading. It came up frequently during our debates. We recognise that the Bill threatens the railway engineering industry in a way that passengers, freight users and the environment are not threatened at this stage. They will be affected only when the Bill comes into operation and we find out whether it works. The railway engineering industry began to suffer as soon as the whiff of privatisation was in the air. That is made clear in the Select Committee report.

The report literally illustrates the point graphically. It sets out the levels of the order books of the railway engineering companies and suggests that by the end of 1995 there will be no orders on those books. The report clearly shows how long it has been since orders were placed by British Rail and others. The fall-off in business has been significant. When speaking to the Select Committee, Lord Prior said that £150 million over three years was nothing like sufficient and that unless there were more orders there would be no industry left in three years.

9.15 pm

I and other hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee acknowledge that the Minister is a good listener and that he responds constructively whenever possible. We welcome the fact that he has included in the new clause the ability for the franchising director to pass on rolling stock. That is a constructive move, because without it no one will want to acquire rolling stock for relatively short leases. The ability to pass on leased rolling stock is essential if the railway engineering industry is to get orders.

I want to ask some questions about the way in which the franchising director's ability to pass on rolling stock links with new clause 14, which deals with the ability to form finance companies, and new clause 18, which also refers to financing. The three hang together——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not use new clause 14 as a key element in his argument, but will wait until we reach that new clause. The same applies to new clause 18. The hon. Gentleman's argument must be centred on the new clause before the House.

Mr. Gunnell: I thought that this was the time to raise points about the rolling stock aspects because three other hon. Members, including the Minister, have done so. However, on the question of the financing of that stock I shall happily wait until we reach new clause 18 and make a brief contribution then.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to new clause 23, which refers to schemes relating to the transfer of assets. It is in that context that the Minister and other hon. Members referred to the transfer of rolling stock and that is why my hon. Friend referred to it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. I heard the other contributions to which he referred. The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) specifically referred to new clauses 14 and 18 and said that he would develop his argument. I am saying that he must concentrate his remarks on the new clauses before us. If he wishes to speak later on new clauses 14 and 18, that is appropriate—but he cannot develop his argument on those new clauses now.

Mr. Gunnell: I shall rest my case at this stage by saying only that I recognise that the financial aspect of leased rolling stock is part of the franchising director's ability to pass on that stock. However, I must say that that is necessary as a protection for the railway engineering industry only because of the threats resulting from privatisation. I am not saying that the new clause is necessary in itself—it would be better to be without the Bill and then we would not need the new clause.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) opened up the question of fares very elegantly, supported by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon). The latter and I are in competition for representing the worst commuter line into London. Those from Essex maintain that the line from Southend is the worst; we in Kent believe that the run from the Kent coast and the Kent link, along the north Kent coast, are worse than the Essex run. Either way, we compete for the worst rail link in Network SouthEast.

That is why I am on my feet this evening. Although I have not been deluged with letters about the Bill by my constituents, they have raised justifiable concerns about what may happen to them. They travel into London along a line of about the same length as the one from Tonbridge

and they pay about £2,000 a year to stand in filthy carriages being transported from the Medway towns. My constituency includes a station on the Kent link and one on the Kent coast line. Although the Kent link trains are beginning to improve, the Kent coast trains are still dreadful. My constituents fear that they will end up travelling on the same clapped-out rolling stock but paying a good deal more for the privilege.

I think that it was the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) who mentioned the much-vaunted Steer Davies Gleave report which makes an even more horrific suggestion—that fares on London commuter services would have to rise by at least 58 per cent. if the Government went ahead with their plans to halve Government grant over the next three years.

My constituents considered that the increase that they suffered in January this year—because of poor standards of service on the north Kent line, it was limited to between 5 and 6 per cent., compared with the average 8 per cent. —was unreasonable. They would consider an increase of 10 times that amount extremely unreasonable. They are particularly worried that the sort of investment which will be needed on the Kent coast lines into London over the next decade will be so large that, to achieve the return of 8 per cent. for the Treasury, heavy fare increases will be required. My constituents have some aspirations to an improvement in their service when the channel tunnel fast link is built, because commuter trains may be allowed to travel on the line, joining it somewhere close to Dartford. But even then, they will be expected to pay a premium for the privilege of shortening their journey.

I support my right hon. Friends the Members for Tonbridge and Malling and for Southend, West. Like them, I should like to hear from the Minister of State what sort of fare increases he would consider reasonable for my constituents, who daily pay a high price to travel on a very poor service from north Kent and the Medway towns.

Mr. Cryer: The new clause gives the impression that the Government are anticipating dealing with a gang of crooks. This will not be a decent organisation in which franchisees compete with one another to provide excellent services:

> "A person who intentionally alters, suppresses or destroys any document which he has been required by any notice under subsection (4) above to produce is guilty of an offence and shall be liable—
> (a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;
> (b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine."

So the Government anticipate that some dubious people will engage in the franchising process—so much so that they feel the need for criminal sanctions to make sure that people provide information to the appointed director. That is a peculiar attitude to adopt. Some Conservative Members say that, save for a few minor reservations about fares and other such matters, they agree with the principle of the Bill. It is an odd principle to embrace in which criminal sanctions will be used to provide information on which to base judgments about awarding franchises.

Also, much energy and time will need to be devoted to awarding franchises, but that will not help passengers. We are talking not about any improvement to the service or new rolling stock but about documentation. The Department of Transport suggest that as many as 14,000 contracts could be created. There is no doubt who will benefit from that—Messrs Sue, Grabbit and Runne. Enormous fees will fall payable to lawyers as arguments about franchise contracts run riot.

Experience of British Rail privatisation so far suggests that there will be confusion. The only examples of privatised services on British Rail have gone into liquidation, such as Yeoman and Stagecoach. Those services have gone by the board. Another is apparently not in a good financial state but the Secretary of State has asked British Rail not to foreclose on that operation during the passage of the Bill because it would embarrass the Government. That does not augur well.

When people become involved in drawing up contracts, arguing about the amount of information provided, and threaten legal action to obtain such information, that energy is not being devoted to running a railway service, running clean trains into stations on time, timetabling to the convenience of passengers, and the multiplicity of other aspects that go into running a railway.

It is not easy to run a railway, particularly given the highly intensive services that operate in the United Kingdom. They take much effort, and many men and women, in providing services that run on time. The Bill undermines those people, and that will add a crazy bureaucracy, with threats of legal action of one sort or another, civil or criminal—as new clause 4 stipulates.

The scope of the new clauses indicates a lack of Government preparation. They produced a White Paper and took the Bill through Committee, but still they are introducing mammoth new clauses. That is hardly the action of a Government who have considered the legislation and are well prepared to put it before Parliament. It is the action of a Government making a last-gasp attempt to arrive at a vaguely workable solution. Throughout the nation, the public are deeply apprehensive about the Government's proposals. I am pleased that the Government have at long last acknowledged, in clause 23, rolling leases—so that as one franchisee collapses into liquidation, leases can continue to provide a degree of security for leaseholders.

As the Minister well knows, that arrangement was requested two years ago for electrification of the Airedale and Wharfedale lines. The Government could not agree and as a result there is still an argument about the provision of new rolling stock on the lines that are currently being fitted with overhead electrification. There is still a possibility that second-hand and third-hand rolling stock that has cascaded down from other services will be used on a brand-new, electrified railway providing an intensive commuter service.

Incidentally, on occasions the Airedale and Wharfedale uses four-wheel rail buses, which do not provide the best ride, coupled together to provide a barely adequate service that is highly overcrowded at peak times. I wish that the Minister had adopted the ideas in new clause 23 about 18 months ago, because then we could have arranged leases. That would have obviated the problem that arose when, because of the uncertainty surrounding the Government's proposals, the Royal Bank of Scotland refused to provide the cash to introduce new rolling stock under a leasing system. It is a belated conversion. That is recognised in new clause 23. If it provides some degree of certainty that new rolling stock will be provided, it is a step in the right direction, although it is a minor one when one considers the chaos that the Bill will cause.

Mr. Alan Williams: Because of the way in which they have been reported, hon. Members misunderstand the leasing arrangements. Is my hon. Friend aware that British Rail will not be allowed to take on leases? It was made clear in Committee by the Scottish Office Minister that if British Rail takes on any leases it will be under an obligation to pass them on at the first opportunity to a franchisee.

9.30 pm

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. In the case of the Airedale and Wharfedale line, it happened to be the passenger transport authority that would have undertaken the leasing. As the Government had not produced clear proposals, financial institution after financial institution said, "Because we do not know what the future will bring, there is absolutely no guarantee. Therefore we shall not support the passenger transport authority." A lamentable position was created by these nutty proposals.

Amendment No. 237, which stands in the name of several Conservative Members, is a reasonable proposal, but, unlike them, I am completely opposed to the principle of the Bill. It spells chaos and uncertainty and in the worst set of circumstances it means that services will not run. Those Members of Parliament with Southend constituencies cannot get across the virtues of the Bill to the people of Southend, so they are begging the Minister for a titbit to persuade their constituents that everything is all right. They will find, however, under the worst possible confluence of circumstances, that trains do not arrive at Southend. If a firm goes into liquidation overnight, there will be absolutely no possibility of services running the following day if the receivers are called in and they say that they cannot authorise further activity by that company. The franchising director has the power to arrange for services to continue, but it remains a real possibility that in the worst possible confluence of circumstances, services will not run.

Any amendment that suggests that some regard should be paid to fares should be incorporated in the Bill. A few hon. Members have said that it could be argued that higher fares are necessary because of the need to invest. Those arguments were used when water was privatised. However, even some Conservative Members who voted for water privatisation now say that charges are too high and that a balance has to be struck between the need to invest and the ability of water customers to pay the bills. One Conservative Member of Parliament who voted for water privatisation even went to the extent of introducing a ten-minute Bill that would have brought about a change in the structure in either Kent or one of the south-western counties. It would have led to that county being exempt from the increased charges that the water company had justified, on the basis of the need to invest.

The same argument could be used regarding fare increases. Passengers in an area that depends heavily on commuters are entitled to be able to make a judgment between the amount of money spent on investment and the amount of money that they can afford to pay when they have to travel between 50 and 60 miles to get to work.

I should have thought that amendment No. 237 had some merit in that it does not impose an absolute obligation on the Minister. However, if a group of passengers, some of whom are extremely well organised, believed that the franchising organisations were charging too high a fare, it would give them the reserve right of a possible application for a judicial review at the worst of the confrontation, or would at least make the franchising operators conscious of a statutory obligation to passengers which, as the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said, is only sketchily outlined in the Bill.

It is worth reminding the House of something that we all know. Once the Bill has passed all its stages in this place, gone to another place, returned and has been given Royal Assent, it will be out of our hands. If it does not contain a safeguard for passengers, any protection will be well and truly gone.

I wish to ask the Minister about the line from Leeds to Bradford, up the Aire valley, through Keighley to Skipton, which is being electrified. It is a monopoly line as there are not two lines running up the Aire valley but only one.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): What about the hon. Gentleman's railway?

Mr. Cryer: It does not run up the Aire valley. The hon. Member is referring to the Keighley and Worth Valley line. It was discarded by British Rail many years ago, but I am happy to say that it is now running extremely well. The line to which he refers does not run up the Aire valley, but up the Worth valley which is a tributary to the Aire valley.

The Aire valley railway is a monopoly. When it is electrified, will the Aire valley route be treated as a monopoly and will fares be capped? If so, we should know about it and we should also know what form the capping will take. The Government say that capping is very popular with local authorities, although there is not much evidence of that. They say that they cap local authorities because they do not want local authorities to place too heavy a burden on local council tax payers. The same argument will surely be applied to rail fares so that franchisees are not allowed to become too greedy.

The Minister may expatiate on the virtues of the water and telephone privatisations, but no one, other than the blind and ideologically foolish, could say that people on the boards of privatised concerns have not exhibited greed in levering their salaries to heights which have invoked derision and contempt from the customers who have to pay. There is nothing to make us suppose that that could not happen with the franchising operators if they could get away with it.

It will be interesting to know whether the lines in the area that I represent will be subject to fare capping limitations so that people who have to commute in and out of Leeds and Bradford will not suffer enormous burdens as a result of the legislation. We want to find out what improvements we can make to the legislation because, as drafted, it is a recipe for utter railway chaos, degradation and gloom. We are merely trying to improve what is hopeless, wholly ideologically daft legislation which should have been thrown out at the beginning.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): I declare an interest because I am a consultant to Hertz Rent a Car. I wish to raise one issue, and I believe that this is the correct group of amendments under which to raise it.

I am worried about the fact that the Bill does not mention protection for people who provide services at stations. Hertz Rent a Car has a contract with British Rail,

which enables it to provide such a service. The Bill contains no mention whatever of what will happen to its arrangements after privatisation. The Minister may say that, when an operator takes over the running of a station, a new arrangement or agreement can be made but the Bill contains no recognition of that.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) will remember when we debated the Airports Act 1984. The same situation arose because it was suggested that the only people who used the facilities at airports were the airport owners and airline operators. We raised an issue similar to the one that I am raising now. There are others besides British Rail who use the stations. The franchisees, as in airports, earn a living from that facility.

When my hon. Friend replies, will he explain with some clarity exactly where the people who operate on the stations—in newspaper stands, Tie Rack shops or car rental—will stand under the new proposals and whether there will be any benefits for or guarantees of their future operation from those stations?

Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) has already dealt with amendent (a). I shall voice some support for amendment No. 237, tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). It raises issues that relate not only to the south-east and London commuter area, which the right hon. Gentleman described, but to other parts of the country.

Anxiety about levels of fares is found in many parts of the country and monopoly, as other hon. Members have said, exists in many areas. I take the example of the Berwick to Penzance train. Just after 9 am every day, a train departs from Berwick for Penzance. It is used by many people travelling to the west country and to the midlands along a route that may involve numerous different franchisees in the future. I notice that the list of franchises published today has still not been able to crack the problem of what to do with the Berwick-Penzance train. People using that train often travel on a combination of railcards, apex fares and whatever other bargain they can put together so that they can visit their relatives in another part of the country. They see themselves as potential victims of large fare increases on cross-country journeys.

I ask the Minister to take a sympathetic view of amendment No. 237 and to recognise the importance of declaring from the start that the franchising director has a responsibility on fares. He should not merely have, as the Government propose in the new clause, a right to concern himself with fares; he should be charged with the responsibility of promoting low fares.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) touched on the immediate consequences of receivership. I remain extremely concerned about what will happen when a contractor on a major route goes into receivership, which is quite possible as recent experience demonstrates. I believe that the trains will stop and that all action by the employees of the franchise holder will be immediately stopped. Notices will go up at stations saying that no further trains can be run, that announcements will be made in due course, that meetings are taking place, that approaches are being made and that the franchising director is having discussions with bodies that might run the franchise. In the meantime, there will be an interrupted service.

I am reminded of what can happen by the experience of a friend who sought to prevent a major company of which he was a director going into receivership. He was travelling on a train and making calls from his mobile telephone to set up meetings to try to get more orders for the company. At 9 am precisely, he ceased to be able to make any further calls. The message came on his mobile telephone, "Your mobile telephone service has been disconnected." It was disconnected because at 9 am the receivers walked in and gave immediate instructions that anything that might incur a charge or liability was to be stopped immediately. That is exactly what is likely to happen in the immediate aftermath of receivership.

I hope that the Minister can now give us some explanation about what will happen. Ministers have rightly used the argument in relation to strikes and industrial disputes that an interrupted service is a service that destroys itself. If trains are withdrawn, people will have to make other arrangements and transfer to some other form of transport. Through the possibility of receivership, which has not existed in the railway system before, Ministers are introducing the possibility of interruption of service every bit as damaging as strike action in that it will lead people to believe that the service is unreliable and one on which they cannot depend.

I have a question for the Minister about the powers of the franchising director. The previous assurance given by the Secretary of State has been questioned by people who have put the following point to me. The Secretary of State has said that passengers travelling from stations such as Berwick and Alnmouth will have confidence that their InterCity services will continue because the franchising director has the power to insist that the existing timetable forms the basis of the franchise.

It has been put to me that that power will effectively be non-existent where the franchise does not involve an element of subsidy. Where no subsidy is being offered and where there is a commercial franchise in which maximum commercial freedom is being offered, that guarantee will not exist. I hope that that is not the case. If it is, that would destroy the assurance given in terms by the Secretary of State during Question Time a month or two ago. Perhaps the Minister will address that.

My final point about the franchising director relates to what he does in relation to the boundary lines of the system. For example, I looked at the maps that were issued today and discovered from the ScotRail map that ScotRail is not allowed to run a train to Dunbar. It has no power to run a train there. It has no access to the railway line that leads to Dunbar which is an InterCity route. So far as I can see, Dunbar is the only station in Scotland to which ScotRail cannot run a train.

9.45 pm

In addition, ScotRail cannot run a train to Berwick, which is the rail head for much of the borders, and into which subsidised bus services feed. What does the franchising director do if the franchisee with the service from Newcastle to Berwick, which is a local and minimal service with two trains a day, does not improve that service and the franchising director believes, as I believe, that it will be better to have a through service between Newcastle and Edinburgh picking up passengers at several stations including Berwick, Dunbar and Alnmouth? The franchise system that has been set out would not permit that to happen because ScotRail has no access to Berwick or

Dunbar. The regional franchise holder in the north of England has no access beyond Berwick, as the maps make clear. Only InterCity can provide that service. I presume that an InterCity contractor would not regard it as its role to provide a service stopping at smaller stations to which InterCity does not provide a service at the moment, for example, stopping at stations like Chathill, Acklington and Drem.

I do not understand what the franchising director will do in those circumstances, particularly if the InterCity contractor does not provide an adequate service, even to existing InterCity stations. I hope that the Minister can assist us in respect of some of those matters when he replies.

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): I should begin by declaring an interest as, for a number of years, I have been a consultant to InterCity. Perhaps, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and I can get together in order to help him with his problem.

The amendments and new clauses that we are discussing encapsulate some of the problems to which my hon. Friends have alluded. Reference has been made to the leasing of rolling stock. Following the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his autumn statement, we know that £150 million was up for grabs for leasing. Unfortunately, the west coast main line, the London-Tilbury-Southend line and the Kent coast line require that money and £150 million between those three lines will go very little distance.

I believe that I am correct to state that the west coast main line needs £750 million to £800 million to improve rolling stock. The Kent coast main line desperately needs £550 million for new rolling stock. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) referred to that. In addition, the London-Tilbury-Southend line needs hundreds of millions of pounds for rolling stock and the infrastructure and signalling that the line so desperately needs.

We are talking about large sums of money and there seems to be a large lacuna in the Bill in relation to where the investment will come from in the short term, over the next two or three years, to at least maintain the present railway service and, hopefully, to improve it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has tabled a very good amendment about fare structures. We know that there will be capping where there are monopolies such as in respect of many commuter lines into London. However, many right hon. and hon. Members have reminded us that many lines are not necessarily monopolies, but are essential to certain local communities. In some cases they require investment in new rolling stock and perhaps new track and other equipment which would justify quite considerable increases in fares.

My right hon. and hon. Friends from Kent will be aware that the Kent coast line requires a massive injection of investment and that could be used as an excuse to hoick up fares to service that £550 million worth of investment. Many commuters could then be priced out of the market. There is a real problem. I echo the calls for my hon. Friend the Minister to give a fair wind to the demands made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling for measures to be built into the Bill. That is terribly important. Exhortations from Secretaries of State or the House are insufficient. If a franchise decides at some stage to hoick up fares unreasonably, Parliament has made the decision and must be reported to. I hope that we get a positive response.

Mr. Wolfson: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no comparable role—as in other privatisations—to that of the regulator for the interests of the consumer? Does he also agree that the amendment, about the role of the franchise director, who must take into account reasonableness of fare increases, would go some way to rectify that?

Sir Keith Speed: I accept that, and go further. We should be learning from the lessons of some of the previous privatisation legislation to see whether Ofgas and Ofwat, for example, were given sufficiently wide powers. At least we are determined not to make the same mistake. I accept the point that my hon. Friend makes. I hope that we can learn from experience.

I commend the amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor). Local consumer groups and rail travellers' groups are terribly important. My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend talked about the need of those groups to be informed by Ministers, but there is a great role for the groups to play, certainly in Kent, Essex and elsewhere, to inform Ministers and franchise operators. They have local knowledge, and know what is required. In Ashford, where new timetables have been drawn up, there has been much controversy. The role of the commuter groups in saying what they want, the stations they want to go to and the sort of timetable they want has been of immense value to British Rail and made a lot of commercial sense. The railway company is providing the service customers want rather than the service the railways want to operate. It is very much a two-way movement and I hope that the amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend can be accepted. They would make a positive contribution towards getting even better rail services, particularly in commuter areas.

Mr. Alan Williams: I want to take two minutes to focus attention on an anomaly to which the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) drew the attention of the House earlier. He did the House a favour in doing so. We have been hearing about a fare cap. I served with some hon. Friends for more than 100 hours on the Committee stage of the Bill. Not only did the Committee not focus particularly strongly on the fare cap, but the matter did not even surface during the whole Committee stage. One wonders what the fare cap is all about. Is it about railways or divisions? Is it anything to do with real delivery or is it an attempt to lure the lambs on the Conservative Benches into the Lobby behind the Minister?

There is a basic incongruity in the argument. It is not possible to argue that subsidies will go on Network SouthEast. It is not possible to argue that there will be cuts in subsidies on the line mentioned by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling and to argue that there will be a cap. As has been said, if there is a cap, there will be a 37 per cent. gap between the present fare structure and viability. Who is to take on the line mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman, which has a 58 per cent. viability gap? Why have not we heard about the capping before? The Secretary of State has not said much about the Bill. He did not come to the Committee to give us the benefit of his

thoughts on capping. There were more than 100 hours of argument in Committee, but not once did the Minister to my recollection shelter behind the defensive position that a cap would have given him when fares were referred to.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Has the right hon. Gentleman failed to take account of the £300 million subsidy that goes into Network SouthEast and the £700 million that goes into the other regional railways? If the right hon. Gentleman took that sum of some £1,000 million into account, I think that his argument would be rather different.

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman has just made my case foir me. That money must be made up with capped railway fares, because, according to the Minister, the railways will not receive those subsidies in future. The objective is to phase out the subsidies for Network SouthEast. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling cited his area.

I do not mind how the Minister squares the circle. Conservative Members obviously want to be persuaded and I shall be fascinated to hear what he has to say; but —I say this particularly to hon. Members who have been in the House for a while and are not too dewy-eyed about ministerial assurances—it is strange and puzzling that a fare cap should suddenly appear at the same time as a mini-rebellion. I suspect that, ultimately, the fare cap will prove to have as little reality as the rebellion.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Let me say a little about amendment No. 237. There is no doubt that many of our constituents who use British Rail frequently—whether to commute, to shop or for pleasure—are very concerned about the effect of privatisation on fares. We have heard a number of arguments today about how their concern will be met, but it seems almost certain that costs will increase, at least in the short term.

One possibility is capping fares on the one hand and increasing Government subvention on the other. As the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) pointed out, there is room for doubt about how long that subvention will continue, which points to an increase in fares. The Select Committee's report advocated a strict limit to fare increases, tied to the retail prices index. The Government replied that they would

"give guidance to the Franchising Director on this matter."

Amendment No. 237 was tabled in an attempt to elicit just that guidance.

It is unreasonable to expect people to accept that the Government's proposals will lead to improved efficiency and improved services if they cannot take advantage of those improvements because of extraordinary increases in costs. I urge Ministers to bear the consumer interest in mind, especially in regard to amendment No. 237.

Dr. Marek: The two amendments that have caught the House's attention in the past hour and a half are amendment (a) to new clause 23 and amendment No. 237. Let me make a general point. Neither amendment would do grave damage to the Bill; in my view, they would both improve it no end. Notwithstanding the Government's political dogma, the amendments would not drive a coach and horses through it and might even make life easier for the Government at the end of the day.

What is the franchising director to do when a company goes bust and services are withdrawn or likely to be withdrawn at a moment's notice? He can try to form a company himself—under some of the Government's new clauses he will have various possibilities to consider. But the easiest way would be to ask the British Railways Board to run the service again. It may take the franchising director five minutes or half an hour to decide, but I am sure that the board would be prepared to take on that duty as it would have the skills, expertise and capability to do so.

Why are the Government resisting amendment (a)? The only answer to that can be political dogma——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Railways Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

Question agreed to.

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Dr. Marek: The Government must be resisting the amendment purely on the grounds of political dogma. They are not interested in running a proper railway service with a proper national timetable with connections that will enable people to transfer from one train to another. They are more interested in divesting themselves of the responsibility of running the railway services. If that is not the case, the Minister must put a lucid and persuasive case to the contrary, and I do not believe that he can. If the Bill is ever enacted, amendment (a) will help the Government, rather than hinder them.

Amendment No. 237 will not shake the Bill to its foundations and the Government should not resist it. The amendment should be properly considered by the House.

Clause 4 imposes a number of duties on the regulator. There are seven duties, (a) to (g), which are somewhat conflicting. The first duty, (a), is

"to protect the interests of users of railway services".

That duty will not always run in tandem with (f), under which the regulator has to

"impose on the operators of railway services the minimum restrictions which are consistent with the performance of his functions under this Part".

In individual cases, the regulator will have to decide which of the duties assigned to him is most important. Clearly, the functions contain nothing about the fare levels, although clause 4(1)(a) contains the general statement:

"to protect the interests of users of railway services"——

[Interruption.]

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. The hon. Gentleman is having difficulty making himself heard.

Dr. Marek: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I shall not speak for too long. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Hon. Members must not tempt me as I could introduce more issues that need to be raised. However, for the convenience of the House, I shall try to keep my remarks brief.

In Committee I tried to introduce an amendment that would raise the level of clause 4(1)(a) to make it more important than (b) to (g), but the Government refused to entertain any such amendment, and persuaded their Back Benchers to vote against it. Amendment No. 237 is a sensible amendment. The amendment will not wreck the Bill or drive a coach and horses through it. It is in the interests of consumers and railway passengers—I speak as a railway passenger. Before Conservative Members troop

[Dr. Marek]

into the Lobby, I hope that they will examine the proposals carefully. The Government's life is not at stake. The Minister's hair shirt should not be at stake over something like this. However, passengers and railway users will benefit if the regulator is able to exercise some of his power in favour of consumers by keeping down unwarranted and unnecessary fare increases.

If the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) and the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling press their amendments to a vote, they can be sure that they will have my support.

Mr. Wilson: We are moving towards a vote and I certainly do not want to detain the House for long. However, some of the points raised require a little elaboration.

The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) said that the cost of transport is the second biggest household item. It is worth noting that hon. Members are privileged to be spared at least one item from which many of our constituents suffer—the cost of parking at stations. We all have our little passes. Sharper-eyed Members in the House may have noticed that the new passes run from May 1993 to March 1994 instead of May 1993 to May 1994. The reason is that no one knows who will own the car parks, run the trains, own the stations, and so on after March 1994.

It is rare to find Tory Members voting against self-interest—they will vote for the abolition of these little passes as well as the fragmentation of the system. I do not care about the passes, but I care very much about the loss of network benefits to pensioners, young people and all the other constituents who will suffer as a result of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) asked about the railway companies that will be able to bid for franchises. We know that British Rail will not be able to bid. It will be written out of existence—it will be given the airbrush treatment. It will be excluded from all its present roles as rapidly as the Government can achieve that. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is not only state-owned railways that will be excluded, because the state railways of Germany, France, Ireland or any other EC country will be able to bid for franchises. The only state railway that will not be able to bid or play a proper part in our nation's affairs is that of Britain. That is not a measure born of rationality or one excluding the public sector; it is a specific act of prejudice against British Rail which cannot be dressed up in any other way.

As the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling said, there are three elements that lead with all certainty to substantial increases in fares if the legislation is passed. The first element is that private companies will reasonably be looking for a profit—they would not be in the business if they were not looking for a profit—so that new element will have to be extracted from somewhere.

The second element is subsidy. Earlier, it was said that the subsidy for the current year has been reduced by 23 per cent. It might increase next year and come down the year after that, but the overall expectation is that it will be a decreasing subsidy. The ability of franchisees to make ends meet will depend on that element, which is entirely in the hands of the Government. If franchisees cannot get the money from subsidy in any given year and are making insufficient profit, the only other source of revenue is fares. No hon. Member should disguise from himself the inevitable consequence of fare increases.

The existing railway will not be the only one to bid for subsidy, even if it continues at the present level. In Committee, the Minister for Public Transport said that more services might qualify for grant than at present, but that that did not mean that the total cost of subsidy need be more. More services will bid for subsidy because, for reasons that defy logic, InterCity is to be broken up. Therefore, a railway which currently does not require subsidy, which makes a small profit, will lose its profitable parts to the private sector. Overnight, that will create a new subsidised railway. The loss-making parts of InterCity will be added to the other loss-making railways which will also be bidding for subsidy.

Even if there is the same amount of money as at present, which I doubt, more services will compete for a share. There will be only one other source of revenue to bridge that gap—fare increases. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling rightly spoke about the complete lack of control over fares. The three elements that lead to substantial fare increases are profit, subsidy and lack of control.

The most recent statement of Government policy on the matter was issued last week in response to the Select Committee report. The tone of the Government's response to that unanimous report was derisory and weak on almost every point and it failed to give the satisfactory responses that the report demanded. The unanimous recommendation of the Select Committee was that the franchising director should not be able to permit fares that went beyond the retail price index for fare increases on all franchised services. The Government's response to that is instructive. They said:

"The extent to which fares will be controlled will depend on the degree to which a franchise operates in a competitive market."

So far, so good, but the response continues:

"Where real competition exists from other modes of transport, then the market will determine the level of fares which an operator can charge."

That sentence removes the possibility of intervening in a large swathe of services because there are few services on which there is competition between modes of transport. That next sentence in the response states:

"Where an operator could use significant market power to the detriment of passengers, the franchising agreement will limit fare increases."

That sounds reasonable, but the response continues:

"On the other hand, where passengers are expected to benefit from investment to improve the quality of service, then higher increases in fares may be justified."

Every route that has been mentioned in the debate will require massive investment, and all those routes are excluded from the protections supposedly offered by that reply. Every line in the country is subject to market forces on the basis of that Government response. The assurances are not worth the breath used to utter them because the caveats in the response ensure that the guarantees are meaningless. Whatever is given with one hand is always taken away with the other.

How can the right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and the hon. Member for Southend, East oppose the amendment on the basis of the response from the Government? Those right hon. and hon. Members argue that huge investment is needed on the line, yet the

response from their Government is that if that investment is made, market forces will determine the level of fares. They can take nothing from the debate.

10.15 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth) *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: No, I shall not give way. The House is impatient for the debate to be concluded and I cannot imagine that anything that the hon. Gentleman could contribute would diminish that impatience.

The Steer Davies Gleave report cannot be dismissed by the Government, because it was presented by the same consultants who advised them on bus privatisation. It is worth considering the three categories to which it referred. On InterCity, it stated that the projected 15 per cent. increase in costs meant that, whatever one did to fares, it would be impossible to make that service, once again, an unsubsidised one. The fares on InterCity journeys will increase, but even that money will not be enough to make that an unsubsidised service.

The report also states that, to cover the 15 per cent. increase in costs, it would be necessary to increase Network SouthEast fares by 37 per cent. on current levels. One can play with figures and mention 17 per cent., 27 per cent., 37 per cent. or above, but the message is clear: to generate the necessary returns, fares must increase greatly. The Bill provides no protection against that and hon. Members should not attempt to hide that fact from themselves.

Mr. Dickens: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilson: No, I shall not. The hon. Gentleman was not present for the debate and he cannot turn up now for a spoiling act. He cannot turn up for his sound bite, or, in his case, a large lunch.

Mr. Dickens: The hon. Gentleman is afraid to give way.

Mr. Wilson: Conservative Members do not like facts. They do not like to be told by the consultants' report and every other authoritative source—not by me—that the price of privatisation will be massive fare increases for all their constituents. They must learn to live with that if they pass the Bill.

The other category of services to which the Steer Davies Gleave report referred was regional railways. It stated that a 45 per cent. revenue increase was needed to offset the projected 15 per cent. increase in costs. Those are the facts.

If one passes legislation that will, inherently, increase the costs of running the railways—for reasons well understood by Conservative Members—the only way to pay for them is through increased fares.

On that basis, the Opposition would like to have the opportunity to vote for the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), but unfortunately it was not selected. In due course, we will vote for amendment No. 237, but, in the meantime, I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to vote against new clause 4. Many Conservative Members have spoken a lot of sense about the issue, and if they voted against the new clause, they would record the feeling of the clear majority in the House and in our constituencies.

Mr. Freeman: The debate has lasted for about two and a half hours and it has concentrated, quite rightly, on fares and the report of Steer Davies Gleave. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if, in the interests of time and my intention to be concise, I do not cover all the points made in the debate. I shall, of course, write tomorrow to those hon. Members whom I do not answer.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) sought an assurance that consultations would be held between the franchising director, the public and rail user groups. I can give that assurance. It is important that the franchising director bears in mind what the public wants.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) spoke about the report by Steer Davies Gleave. I categorically reject the conclusions in the report. The assumptions are flawed because the consultants assumed substantial increases in the cost of leasing existing rolling stock which did not occur. They also assumed that Railtrack's charges will disappear outwith the subsidisation of passenger services, which will not happen.

As to subsidies, I can tell the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) that we have not fixed the passenger service obligation grant for next year or the year after. That subsidy is fixed close to the beginning of the financial year and it is incorrect to assume that the Government intend to reduce the subsidies of Network SouthEast or any other part of the railway system.

Mr. Snape: Is it or is it not Government policy, already announced, to reduce the overall subsidy for British Rail by 50 per cent. in the next three years?

Mr. Freeman: No decisions have been taken on the subsidy level for the simple reason that the only figure that is put into the Government public expenditure survey is the external financing limit. The level of subsidy has not been determined. The hon. Gentleman will know that, for the past three years, the Government have had to go back in the middle of the year to increase the subsidy because of the consequences of the recession on fare income. We have responded positively and constructively to the subsidy needs of British Rail.

Amendment No. 237 was tabled, and spoken to, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Williams) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) also referred to it. The Government understand the concerns expressed about fare levels. In Standing Committee, a great deal of time was spent debating how the franchising director would control fare levels on monopoly services.

I understand the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling on the matter. The amendment was selected relatively late. I assure him that, before we come to amendments Nos. 239 and 244, which relate to much the same issues, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will reflect on the debate. We look forward to answering the points and, I hope, satisfying my right hon. and hon. Friends tomorrow with appropriate assurances. The Government and my right hon. and hon. Friends share the same aims—to control fares on monopoly services and to demonstrate to our constituents, the electorate and passengers that we are serious and mean to control fare levels where it is appropriate.

[Mr. Freeman]

I hope that, given those assurances, the House will support new clause 4.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes, 308, Noes 275.

Division No. 279] **[10.24 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray

Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'l'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause added to the Bill.

New clause 13

TRANSFERS OF FRANCHISE ASSETS AND SHARES

'.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Franchising Director before entering into a franchise agreement to satisfy himself that if the franchise agreement is entered into—

(a) the initial franchise assets (if any) for that franchise agreement will be vested in the person who is to be the franchise operator; and

(b) if the franchise agreement is to be one under which the franchisee undertakes to secure that a wholly owned subsidiary of his provides the franchised services, that the franchise operator will be a wholly owned subsidiary of the franchisee.

(2) After a franchise agreement has been entered into, it shall be the duty of the Franchising Director before any property, rights or liabilities are subsequently designated as franchise assets in accordance with the terms of, or by amendment to, the franchise agreement, to satisfy himself that, if the property, rights or liabilities in question are so designated, they will be vested in the franchise operator.

(3) Without the consent of the Franchising Director, the franchise operator shall not—

(a) if and to the extent that the franchise assets are property or rights—

(i) transfer or agree to transfer, or create or agree to create any security over, any franchise assets or any interest in, or right over, any franchise assets; or

(ii) create or extinguish, or agree to create or extinguish, any interest in, or right over, any franchise assets; and

(b) if and to the extent that the franchise assets are liabilities, shall not enter into any agreement under which any such liability is released or discharged, or transferred to some other person.

(4) Where the franchise agreement is one under which the franchisee undertakes to secure that a wholly owned subsidiary of his provides the franchised services, the franchisee shall not, without the consent of the Franchising Director, take any action which would result in the franchise operator ceasing to be a wholly owned subsidiary of his.

(5) In any case where—

(a) there are to be initial franchise assets in relation to a franchise agreement,

(b) a franchise agreement is to be one which provides for subsequent designation of property, rights or liabilities as franchise assets, or

(c) property, rights or liabilities are to be designated as franchise assets by an amendment made to a franchise agreement,

the Franchising Director shall ensure that the franchise agreement includes provision specifying, or providing for the determination of, amounts to be paid in respect of the property, rights and liabilities which, immediately before the end of the franchise period, constitute the franchise assets in relation to that franchise agreement if and to the extent that they are transferred by transfer scheme at or after the end of that period.

(6) Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions that may be included in a franchise agreement with respect to the acquisition, provision, disposal or other transfer of property, rights or liabilities (whether franchise assets or not), the Franchising Director may undertake in a franchise agreement to exercise his powers under Part II below to transfer franchise assets to himself or another in such circumstances as may be specified in the franchise agreement.

(7) The Franchising Director shall ensure that every franchise agreement includes such provision (if any) as he may consider appropriate in the particular case for the purpose of securing—

(a) that the franchise assets are adequately maintained, protected and preserved; and

(b) that, at the end of the franchise period, possession of such of the franchise assets as may be specified for the purpose in the agreement, or by the Franchising Director in accordance with the agreement, is delivered up to the Franchising Director or such other person as may be so specified.

(8) In this Part, "franchise assets", in relation to any franchise agreement, means—

(a) any property, rights or liabilities which are designated as franchise assets in the franchise agreement as originally made (in this section referred to as the "initial franchise assets"), and

(b) any property, rights or liabilities which, after the making of the franchise agreement, are designated as franchise assets in accordance with the terms of, or by an amendment made to, the franchise agreement,

but does not include any property, rights or liabilities which, in accordance with the terms of, or by an amendment made to, the franchise agreement, have for the time being ceased to be designated as franchise assets.

(9) No rights or liabilities under contracts of employment shall be designated as franchise assets.

(10) In this section "security" has the meaning given by section 248(b) of the Insolvency Act 1986.

(11) Any sums required by the Franchising Director for making payments for or in connection with the acquisition, transfer or disposal of property, rights or liabilities in pursuance of provisions contained in a franchise agreement shall be paid by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament.

(12) Any sums received by the Franchising Director for or in connection with the acquisition, transfer or disposal of property, rights or liabilities in pursuance of provisions contained in a franchise agreement shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 23

POWERS OF THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR TO MAKE TRANSFER SCHEMES

'.—(1) The Franchising Director shall have power to make schemes for the transfer, at or after the end of the franchise period, of property, rights and liabilities which, immediately before the end of that period, are for the time being designated as franchise assets for the purposes of the franchise agreement in question to—

(a) the Franchising Director,

(b) a company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director, or

(c) a franchise company.

(2) In the following provisions of this section—

(a) the "transferor" means the person from whom any such property, rights or liabilities as are mentioned in subsection (1) above are transferred by a scheme under this section; and

(b) the "transferee" means the person to whom any such property, rights or liabilities are so transferred.

(3) Subject to any contrary agreement or arrangements which may be made between the transferor and the transferee, where any property, rights or liabilities are transferred by a scheme under this section, there shall be paid by the transferee to the transferor or, as the case may require, by the transferor to the transferee, on the day on which the scheme comes into force such sums as may be specified in, or determined in accordance with, the franchise agreement mentioned in subsection (1) above.

(4) Subject to the following provisions of this Part, on the day on which a scheme under this section comes into force, the property, rights and liabilities affected by the scheme shall, subject to section 85 below, be transferred and vest by virtue of and in accordance with the scheme.

(5) Except as otherwise provided by this Act—

(a) any reference in this Act to a "transfer scheme" shall be taken as including a reference to a scheme under this section;

(b) in the application of any provision of this Act in relation to a scheme under this section, any reference to the "transfer date" shall be taken as a reference to the date on which the scheme comes into force.

(6) In this section "franchise agreement", "franchise period" and "designated as franchise assets" have the same meaning as they have in Part I above.

(7) Any sums required by the Franchising Director for the purpose of making payments in respect of property, rights or liabilities transferred by a scheme under this section shall be paid by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament.

(8) Any sums received by the Franchising Director in respect of property, rights or liabilities so transferred shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 14

POWERS OF THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR TO FORM AND FINANCE COMPANIES AND TO ACQUIRE AND DISPOSE OF ASSETS

'.—(1) The Franchising Director may form companies for the purpose of facilitating the performance of any functions assigned or transferred to him under or by virtue of this Act.

(2) The Franchising Director may—

(a) hold interests in any company which he forms as mentioned in subsection (1) above;

(b) exercise rights conferred by the holding of interests in any such company; and

(c) provide financial or other assistance to or in respect of any such company, including assistance by way of guarantee of its obligations.

(3) The Franchising Director may (whether by exercising his powers to make a transfer scheme or otherwise and whether or not for any consideration) acquire or dispose of any property, rights or liabilities which have been, or which are intended to be, designated as franchise assets by or under any franchise agreement.

(4) Any sums required by the Franchising Director for making payments in consequence of the exercise of any such powers as are mentioned in this section shall be paid by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament.

(5) Any sums received by the Franchising Director in consequence of the exercise of any such powers as are mentioned in this section shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following: Government new clause 15—*Performance of Franchising Director's duties to secure the provision of services etc.*

Government new clause 21—*Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement.*

Amendment (b) to new clause 21, leave out lines 9 to 11.

Government amendments Nos. 160, 113 to 117, 121, 119, 120, 118, 122, 125, 123, 124, 126, 130, 148, 178, 176, 175, 71, 81 and 82.

Mr. Freeman: I will be brief but will explain the reasons for these amendments, which all relate to the franchising director's ability to form companies, to fulfil his duty—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask right hon. and hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quietly—and those remaining to give the Minister a fair hearing.

Mr. Freeman: I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Government new clause 14 and the other new clauses grouped with it relate to the ability of the franchising director to form companies so that the franchising director is able to ensure the continuation of rail passenger services, in the event of the early termination of a franchise or when a subsequent franchise competition, after the first one, results in failure to let a new franchise.

The first time round, if there are no acceptable competing bids, British Rail continues to run the service. In the event of a closure having been proposed but not yet approved, the franchising director has to ensure the continuation of the services for the time being.

Government new clause 14 gives the franchising director powers to form and finance companies which will be wholly owned subsidiaries of the franchising director. The intention is that those companies should either themselves perform the service or contract with others to provide a rail passenger service. Government new clause 14 also gives powers to the franchising director to acquire and dispose of designated franchise assets. Our previous debate touched in part on the definition of designated franchise assets, including leased rolling stock.

Government new clause 15 enables the franchising director to perform his duties by securing the provision of services by agreement with others—for example, a neighbouring franchisee. The new clause gives the franchising director power to stipulate fares and, therefore, to control them.

Finally, Government new clause 21 places a duty on the franchising director to secure the continued provision of rail passenger services, except where he considers that there are satisfactory alternatives.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that we could debate this new clause at great length and go over much of the ground that was covered in the last debate, but it is in nobody's interest to do so. Our views on the role of the franchising director have been set out, as have our concerns about the power that he is to be given—taking responsibility for many of these matters, the Government hope, at long arm's length from themselves. Therefore, I shall concentrate my remarks on Government new clause 21—"Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement." This is a significant new clause. It is the basis upon which a large number of services would be removed over a number of years.

The key words in the new clause are

"adequate alternative railway passenger services are available;".

The powers given by the new clause allow the franchising director to cease to provide services if, in his opinion, adequate alternative railway passenger services are available.

It is odd that the Government want to add this new clause to the Railways Bill. It deals specifically with circumstances where there are two operators running on the same routes. The most obvious example relates to those parts of the country where there are both InterCity services and Regional Railways services. That was the position on the routes to Blackpool, Clitheroe and a number of other places that have already lost their

[Mr. Wilson]

InterCity direct services. Much more pertinently, the new clause covers those routes that will lose their direct routes, if this legislation is passed.

If I may make so bold as even to refer to the place in present company, Hull is an obvious example. The services to Aberdeen and Inverness on the east coast main line and the services to Penzance on the Great Western line are other obvious examples. The new clause provides a mechanism by means of which these services can be withdrawn.

Nobody doubts that when the franchises are drawn up and advertised, amid much ballyhoo, every station on the railway map as it is at present will be there. But that is not what is at issue. What is at issue is what happens thereafter within a relatively short space of time. Logic suggests that one of the things that will happen is that InterCity—although it is wrong to talk about an entity called "InterCity" because it will no longer exist—will start to rationalise its operations.

10.45 pm

The arguments should be familiar even if they are not. At present, InterCity is an extremely successful railway company. It is successful in that it records a small yearly profit. It does so on the basis of massive cross-subsidy within its own operations, but one of the Bill's specific purposes is to destroy InterCity and remove the possibility of cross-subsidy.

There is currently an entity called InterCity; from next April, there might be the coaches painted in the livery of InterCity and the name may even be used as a marketing device, but the entity itself will have been splintered, not so much to the four winds but to six different profit centres around the country.

I do not pretend to have any insights into the Tory mentality, but, for the life of me, I cannot understand why any Conservative Member, any more than a Labour Member, should regard it as a great wheeze to destroy InterCity. I should have thought that InterCity was something of which people could be reasonably proud—a profitable railway, which is unique in Europe in that respect. For all the abuse that is hurled at it and all the denigration of British Rail, InterCity in my experience provides an absolutely first-class service on the basis of being an integrated, highly motivated entity. In any event, InterCity is to go. It will be no more, but will be divided among six profit centres and a range of separate franchises.

When cross-subsidy is removed, each section of what is now InterCity will be left to its own devices. Some will depend directly on subsidy and a few will be profitable, but we all know that even those that are profitable are not profitable to the extent required by the private sector. The Minister for Transport in London helpfully confirmed that in Committee. I said that even the profit made on the east coast main line, which is by far the most profitable sector of the British Rail network because of the investment that has been put into it, was nothing like what the private sector would want. The Minister readily agreed and said that the private sector would of course be looking for a far higher return and would get it through entrepreneurial flair and better marketing.

I do not think that many people with two brain cells to rub together would accuse InterCity of being deficient in marketing ability. The idea that the east coast main line will greatly increase its profits through better marketing is absurd. Every hon. Member knows that, but it is the basis on which InterCity is being broken up. What I have said applies to the most profitable route on the network, never mind the rest.

When the rubbish has been exposed and the east coast main line is not making the greatly enhanced profit which the Minister for Transport in London acknowledges will be required of it, the operators will be looking for other ways of increasing their profits. Even within the east coast main line, the Great Western line or some other sectors of InterCity, there is a great deal of cross-subsidy. It is an imprecise breakdown, but, by and large, where a route is electrified, it makes money, but because of the additional on-costs of diesel operation where the route is not electrified, it loses money. For example, the east coast main line is highly profitable overall, but north of Edinburgh it is a significant loss maker. In the case of the south-west, perhaps everything south-west of Plymouth is also a clear loss maker. Clearly, when a route is not making the required return, the operators or franchisees—if they ever exist—will look for ways of cutting or getting rid of loss-making routes.

Nobody has suggested that places will be left without train services. The proposition being put forward, which all common sense suggests is what will happen, is that instead of having a choice of direct services to London, there will be feeder services into InterCity at the point at which InterCity becomes profitable. That is exactly what happened at Blackpool, at Clitheroe and at Stranraer a couple of years ago. We are not talking about a far wider range of direct services being threatened.

I ask Conservative Members to study new clause 21 and to ask themselves what other conceivable reason there could be for including it in the Bill, apart from the reason that I have given. People would not lose their trains, but it would be reasonably argued that it was adequate for them to be able to get a train from Aberdeen to Edinburgh to join InterCity there, to get a train from Inverness to Glasgow to join InterCity there or to get a train from Penzance to Plymouth to join InterCity there. It would be argued that there would still be a service with no loss of frequency. However, crucially what would be lost would be direct services.

New clause 21 fits that scenario exactly. The franchising director will be given the power not to say that lines will be closed—nothing as dramatic as that—but to say that adequate alternative railway passenger services are available. The franchising director will not be able to say that adequate bus services are available, but that adequate railway passenger services are available. In other words, the only scenario in which new clause 21 is applicable is one in which there are at present two types of railway operations—Regional Railways and InterCity. InterCity will go and Regional Railways will be left with feeder services.

The proposal makes sense for many other reasons. At present, InterCity travels for nothing on the stretches of line about which I am talking because the costs are borne by Regional Railways. It is a fairly ad hoc arrangement, but essentially both InterCity and Regional Railways are part of British Rail. Although there already are subdivisions—ludicrous in my opinion—and cost apportionment within British Rail, the organisations are part of one operation. That will not be the case in the brave new

world that is envisaged. The operators will pay money to Railtrack and Railtrack will have a commercial imperative under the Bill to make a return from all operators.

Railtrack will not be able to say to InterCity, "You can ride for nothing and we shall put the entire burden of costs on to whichever ship that passes in the night happens to be running that sector of Regional Railways." There would be an outcry: "How can the guy who runs the Regional Railways sector make a profit when his competitor, InterCity, is riding on the tracks for nothing? "That would not be sustainable. However, the moment that one says that Railtrack will charge InterCity or its successor for operating on the tracks, one increases another burden, which is why those services will not be there for very long.

New clause 21 will chop down the branches of InterCity, as experience will show. I do not expect much from most Conservative Members, although I expect a lot from some of them. I suggest that any Conservative Members who have an area served by InterCity which is a loss-making part of the InterCity network at present should look closely at new clause 21. If they can find a better explanation for giving the franchising director the right to cease to provide passenger services if, in his opinion, adequate alternative railway services are available, I should be interested to hear it.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Like the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), I think that new clause 21 is well worth examination. I also draw the House's attention to amendment (b), which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), myself and others of my hon. Friends.

The House is aware of the Government's prime argument for the Bill—that it introduces competition into the railway system. They say that it will lead to customers becoming winners, through lower costs, greater frequency and reliability of trains and a better overall service. That view has clearly been challenged. The key to better performance is not an argument over ownership; it is the key question of investment.

We believe that privatisation is a smoke screen for the Government to hide behind and so avoid the charge of inadequate investment. New clause 21 is a classic example of such a smoke screen. On the face of it, it appears that the Government are trying to do something positive and helpful. It is a good longstop or safety net. If the franchisee ends the agreement, the franchising director will have a duty to secure the provision of the services that were secured under the franchise agreement until there is time for a new franchise agreement to be provided.

The rub comes in the phrase in new clause 21:

"subject to subsection (2) below".

According to new clause 21 (2)(a), the franchising director does not have to

"secure that provision of any services, if and to the extent that, in his opinion, adequate alternative railway passenger services are available."

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North has already described how that could be used to strip away the uneconomical parts of the InterCity service and to provide connecting feeder services that would downgrade many parts of the network.

That exemption and means of relieving the franchising director of a duty reduces competition. Far from promoting competition, it allows a service to be eliminated. Read in conjunction with clause 5, where the franchising director is required to follow the instructions of the Secretary of State, it is clear that services can be withdrawn, although at arms length so that the Government do not get their hands dirty. That is what the franchising director would be required to do.

Despite the rhetoric of competition and improved customer service, the effect of the new clause 21 would be to reduce services. That could apply in many places. The service between Carlisle and Glasgow is the main line from Carlisle to Lockerbie and Carstairs to Glasgow. The other line runs through Annan, Dumfries and Kilmarnock. That line provides a very important service, but it might be challenged with regard to new clause 21.

Scottish Members and Members in the north of England are concerned about how new clause 21 might place a question mark over the key connection of the west coast main line from London to Glasgow. Increasingly, that line is seen to be in competition with the east coast main line in respect of the number of trains linking through Edinburgh into Glasgow.

As the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs was recently informed, in European terms, the west coast main line is the third most important line in terms of traffic flow. The west coast main line and the east coast main line to Edinburgh are key arterial rail routes for Scotland. In its submission to the Select Committee, the CBI in Scotland stated that the "priority" in the rail privatisation exercise was to secure the

"preservation of the East and West Coast Main Lines".

In its evidence to the Scottish Affairs Select Committee, the Department of Transport conceded that the west coast main line was

"vital not just to Scotland's needs, but to that part of England through which it runs".

A survey of businesses in Carlisle carried out by Carlisle city council found that when 91 businesses were asked about rail issues, they stated that the priority to them was the upgrading and improvement of the west coast main line.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Does my hon. Friend also accept that it is vital for areas like mine and for the rest of the north-west that the west coast main line is protected? If we do not have money for that line and the Government use that as an excuse to run down the west coast main line by saying that the east coast main line will take the traffic, my constituency and many other constituencies in the north-west will suffer.

11 pm

Mr. Wallace: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. It is not only a Scottish fear. It is a fear in many parts of the north-west of England. The west coast main line links five key conurbations—Greater London, the west midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Clydeside. Those are important links for the commercial and economic well-being of not only Scotland but of the whole United Kingdom. In addition, there are links into the west coast main line from north Wales, the Fylde coast, Cumbria, the Lake District and the south of Scotland.

So the west coast main line is a key line. We argue that it has been starved of necessary investment in the past 20 years since electrification was completed in 1974. There is a problem of underinvestment which gives rise to fears. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North said that there could be a direct service from Glasgow to London, with routes feeding into that. It could be worse than that. Inter-city services could stop at Preston with only a regional route going to Carlisle.

That begs the question of what would happen to a station such as Lockerbie. I understand that in the previous debate my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) noted that Dunbar could no longer be served by ScotRail. According to the map of the franchise for ScotRail, Lockerbie would not be allowed to have a service provided by ScotRail. If the inter-city service excluded Lockerbie, what would happen to that important station for the south of Scotland?

I remember standing on a crowded Lockerbie station waiting for the train to Edinburgh on many Sunday evenings when I was a student. I understand from local sources that it is still a busy station. Potentially no provision is made for it. There is a need for investment in locomotives and carriages and to improve the reliability of the track and timetabling. In all those matters, the west coast main line has lagged behind the east coast main line.

The trains and carriages on the west coast main line are mostly of a 1970s design. Even if the track were improved to allow greater speed, I understand that the trains and carriages would not allow it. Last year the tendering arrangements for a substantial investment by British Rail

in new carriages and trains for the west coast main line were allowed to lapse because the resources were not there. BR was starved of resources and was unable to go ahead with that necessary investment.

The line is also in urgent need of investment to improve track and signalling systems. In a British Rail document which came into the public domain in February this year it was stated that, in addition to all the other investments, between £3 million and £5 million per annum would be needed every year until 2000 to restore signalling and telecommunications. It said that the track between Carlisle and Gretna in particular was in need of resignalling on safety grounds.

We have poor rolling stock, a poor state of track and increasingly a limit on the high-speed performance of trains on the west coast main line, so it is less competitive than the east coast main line. A cursory look at the timetable shows that the Scottish Pullman takes four and a quarter hours from King's Cross to Edinburgh while the Royal Scot takes one minute short of five hours from Euston to Glasgow. What private company would be prepared to take on the London to Glasgow west coast franchise in the face of fierce competition from the east coast, especially when it is not allowed to compete on level terms?

Paragraph 45 of the Scottish Select Committee report said:

"We wish to see the plan to invest £750 million in track improvements and new rolling stock implemented as soon as possible. This upgrading must not be delayed by uncertainties about rail privatisation and the transfer of responsibility to Railtrack."

That view is certainly endorsed by Opposition Members. I hope that it will also find favour with Conservative Members who also want to see an improved rail network.

Investment is needed to improve and secure quality, enhance safety, reduce operating and maintenance costs, to be more environmentally reliable and, through the improvement of consumer choice, to increase usage and revenue. Investment, not the form of ownership, is the key to providing more effective competition and securing a better service for the customer. We believe that new clause 21(12)(a) is a Trojan horse which could be used to eliminate lines and reduce competition. I hope that the House will support the amendment which my hon. Friends and I have tabled to the new clause.

Mr. Snape: Like earlier speakers, I am concerned about new clause 21(2)(a).

First, there is the competition—if that is the right word—between the west and east coast main lines. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) reminded us, since the completion of the electrification of the west coast line in the mid-1970s there has been little investment in the route, if any: indeed, the service has slowed down by about 35 minutes since the stretch from Weaver junction northwards to Glasgow was electrified. As for the service in other north-western cities, the service between Manchester and Glasgow is no more punctual now than it was in the days of steam. Such a franchise would not prove particularly attractive—to say the least—to any private operator.

There is an investment problem on the west coast main line, and the sooner that problem is tackled, the better; but many of us feel that it will not be tackled by the Bill, which—if anything—is likely to dissuade investors rather than attracting them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) mentioned towns that are currently served by both Regional Railways and InterCity. As he said, the Government propose the fragmentation of the InterCity network. Where that has already happened, InterCity is withdrawing, leaving Regional Railways to provide the only service between, for instance, Blackpool and Preston—where the InterCity service was recently withdrawn—and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, in the west midlands area.

It is an open secret that British Rail want to withdraw InterCity services completely, in the short term, from cities such as Hull: my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North referred to the recent whittling away of that service. But the Bill will not only affect the towns and cities currently served by both InterCity and Regional Railways. I ask the Minister to consider the service between, say, Birmingham and Stratford in the context of new clause 21(2)(a). At present, two services exist, both supported by the passenger transport executive: one runs via Solihull, the other via Shirley.

Let us suppose that there are two separate franchisees, one of which decides not to renew the franchise or to withdraw the service. Would the franchise director be right in saying that, as another service exists—let us say that the service via Solihull remains—

"adequate alternative railway passenger services are available"?

He might well point out that the distance by road between Solihull and Shirley was five or six miles and that there was a bus service connecting the two points. One rail service still exists; is it adequate, in the terms of the new clause?

A couple of weeks ago, Birmingham Snowhill station—in the same part of the world—was reconnected with London for the first time in 30 years. The Network SouthEast Chiltern line turbo train service was extended to Birmingham Snowhill and there is now a two-hourly service via Solihull. It is difficult to imagine such a franchise being considered particularly attractive once the various sections of the railway network are up for grabs; but let us suppose that someone bids for that franchise and decides after a while to cut the turbo service to Banbury, Bicester or another point on the Marylebone line. Passengers in Solihull who wish to travel by rail normally drive five or six miles up the M42 to Birmingham International station to catch the service running between Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Euston. Could not the franchising director decide that, as that service presumably still exists, it should be regarded as an adequate railway passenger service under the terms of the Bill?

Problems will arise not only in relation to cities that are currently served by two different segments of a nationalised railway system, but in relation to those services that I have just described and similar services in other parts of the country. Will the Minister give a straight answer? What will the franchise director regard as an adequate alternative passenger railway service? Will it be a service of the sort that I have described, or will there be even greater safeguards?

The Minister referred to the franchise director's duty to guarantee future rail services. During the previous debate the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) asked how he or she was to fulfil that duty. In repeating that question I shall outline a scenario which is not beyond the realms of possibility under the terms of the legislation. A franchisee could go bust quickly—as people do—owing a great deal

[Mr. Snape]

of money. That has happened to hundreds of thousands of businesses since the present Administration were elected. People to whom money is owed will seek to recover that money by the sale of the franchisee's assets, whatever they may be. How can the Minister say that, the day after a franchisee goes bust, British Rail or someone else will come to operate those services?

Trains are not like buses; it is not practical to pluck a driver off the street, put him behind the controls of any train and say, "Drive from A to B." Drivers have to know every inch of the route, the signalling system, the bends and the speed restrictions. It is not possible to stop a train in the same way as a bus—it takes weeks, sometimes months, to train drivers on a specific route. How can the Minister say that in the event of a franchisee going bust it is the franchise director's duty to find an alternative operator? How could such a duty be discharged?

Today, the length of an individual route is often controlled by a signal box—to use more modern parlance, a signalling centre. In the event of a franchisee going bust, who negotiates the signalling of that route with the new franchisee, assuming that such an alternative franchisee exists?

The reasoning behind the new clause and others in the group is flawed because it has been drafted on behalf of politicians who believe only in ideology and have failed to look in depth at the problems that will arise if the scenario —which is by no means unlikely—occurs. The Minister will have to come up with better arguments to persuade most Opposition Members that the group of amendments is feasible. I hope that some of the more thoughtful Conservative Members will express the reservations that my hon. Friends and I have expressed.

11.15 pm

Mr. Dickens: The new clause is a safety valve which is central to the Bill. In the unlikely event of a franchisee dropping out, the franchising director can step in to ensure that all our constituents enjoy a proper rail service while a new franchise arrangement is created. That seems to be common sense.

Earlier, many hon. Members talked about profit being a dirty word and higher fares being the only way to create profit. They could not be more wrong. If there is a sensible level of fares, clean comfortable trains running on time with good facilities on them and a package of concessions to make it attractive, people will start to move off the overcrowded roads. We are doing that with freight to Europe and we should do it with passengers all over the country. We should get cars off the roads and people on to trains. However, people will get on trains only is if there is a sensible level of fares and sensible arrangements.

That is the essence of creating a profit. The profit is then ploughed back in. We have ploughed the profits back into many other privatised industries and they have improved to the point at which they are the wonderful industries that we have today. In the old days, we shovelled millions of pounds into a bottomless pit—into nationalised industries —and we never got anything for it except misery all the time.

The Bill is important. New clause 14 is a safety valve to ensure that we keep trains running to our constituencies in the unlikely event of a franchisee dropping out. It is sheer common sense. I cannot understand why any hon. Member would want to vote against something that is a safeguard.

Mr. Gunnell: I shall resist the temptation to respond to the speech of the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens). He shows even more faith than the Conservative Members on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill.

I shall simply ask the Minister two questions. On clause 21, many of the services that will be franchised will be those on which the passenger transport authority and the passenger transport executive have been involved in discussions. If clause 21 becomes operative and there is a failure to provide a sequential franchise, what will be the involvement of the PTA and the PTE at that point? That is not spelt out, but the passenger transport authorities need to be clear about it.

On new clause 14, is it anticipated that, perhaps in securing railway investment, the frachising director will form a finance company to finance, for example, the purchase of rolling stock? If so, and given the powers provided in new clause 18, will it be in order for the franchising director to form a company jointly with perhaps several passenger transport authorities to secure investment in rolling stock?

Mr. Denham: I almost hesitated to raise an example of another route that might be hit by new clause 21? It struck me that, when new clause 21 was being drafted, there must have been a moment at which either the Minister turned to his civil servants and said, "Why don't we put this in new clause 21" and the civil servant said, "What do you have in mind, Minister? What about so and so?", or the civil servants came to the Minister and said, "We think you should put this in new clause 21" and he said, "What do you have in mind? What about such and such a route?"

We have heard speculation about whether the franchising director will say that the east coast route is a satisfactory substitute for the west coast route or vice versa. I have a specific constituency interest to which I referred several times during the Standing Committee deliberations. There is an InterCity route that normally runs from Poole to the north-west—to Manchester—or the north-east. I understand that it is one of the loss-making parts of InterCity. Therefore, it will lose the cross-subsidy from the east coast line when that is privatised.

Most, though perhaps not all, of the stations on the InterCity route from Poole through my constituency can be reached by alternative routes via London. It is usually quicker to go via London, but more expensive under current arrangements. There is a fair degree of passenger choice because people can decide whether to break the journey by travelling via London, spending more and taking less time, or have a longer more roundabout journey.

I said several times in Committee that the cross-country route from Poole is likely to be threatened by the new franchising regime. That is because it will require a subsidy and BR and the Central Transport Consultative Committee have told us in briefings in the past 24 to 48 hours that there is still great uncertainty about whether there will be enough money in the system to subsidise those routes. Any future francisee running that cross-country

route runs a high chance of failing to provide a service or he may decide to withdraw after the initial franchise period.

Does the Minister envisage the alternative routes through London as satisfactory, adequate or acceptable substitutes for the current InterCity route from Poole through Southampton to the north-west and the north-east? It is reasonable to ask the Minister that question because every hon. Member knows that when the framework is in place and the system is operating, complaints about decisions of the franchising director will be met by the Minister or his successor saying, "It has nothing to do with us, guv. It is the responsibility of the franchising director. That is the way Parliament set up the system." This is our only opportunity to ask the Minister what he had in mind with new clause 21.

It is reasonable for hon. Members to name specific routes and ask the Minister whether he decided that they would be acceptable alternatives. The Minister must know the acceptable alternatives, or he would not have used the term in the legislation. Which routes had he in mind when he agreed with his advisers to put that in the Bill?

Mr. Freeman: Six issues have been raised and I shall try to deal with them succinctly. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) spoke about InterCity. I confirm that we want the brand name to continue because there is no reason why it should be inconsistent with the separate management of the individual routes. There will be further discussions with Mr. Christopher Green, who is responsible for running InterCity. I pay tribute to Mr. Green and his managers for what they have achieved. InterCity has been a success story over the past 10 years and it can do better. It needs more investment in rolling stock, especially on the west coast main line, the Great Western line and the midland main line when it is eventually electrified.

The franchising of InterCity services will be based on the whole timetable, including services to Penzance, Inverness and Aberdeen, immediately before the franchise is let. That will apply to all the services and stations served by that InterCity line. The amendments are not about chopping InterCity branches. We want InterCity to thrive.

I agree with the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) that considerable investment is required on the west coast main line; perhaps up to £500 million on the infrastructure and £300 million on rolling stock. If the £150 million worth of new leasing facilities is used on the west coast main line, that would be a start. If not, I assure the hon. Gentleman, as I have already assured the House, that as soon as British Rail makes its mind up on the use of that £150 million facility, we will work with it on the route where that money is not used to devise a proper operating lease which meets the Treasury guidelines. If a satisfactory lease is drawn up, even more investment can be made. We want the west and east coast main lines to be thriving, because we want choice and competition. There is no hidden agenda to end services north of Preston on the west coast main line.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East also asked what would happen should a franchisee go bust. We amended the Bill in Committee to provide for railway administrative orders. They are unique because they enable the franchising director, with the assistance of the courts, to step in to ensure the continued provision of railway services. That is quite unlike the arrangements for any other form of transportation or any other company. It will not happen that a franchisee will be in financial difficulties on a Sunday and the trains will not run on Monday. We spent considerable time developing the new concept of railway administration orders to deal specifically with that problem.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) asked whether the passenger transport executive would have a continuing role should the franchising director not renew a franchise. The answer is yes. If the hon. Gentleman studies clause 29, he will discover that it offers provision on that score. If he is not satisfied, perhaps he would write to me. The hon. Gentleman also raised the interesting idea of a joint company being formed between the franchising director and the passenger transport executive to own rolling stock. I shall certainly consider that suggestion, which is consistent with our desire that the franchising director, the PTE, the franchisee and the lessor should be tied together, by legal agreement, for the provision of new rolling stock.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) asked about cross-country services. We want to franchise all railways that are run—that is our intention. When we come to franchise the InterCity cross-country services, the same principle will apply. We will take the entire service offered and franchise it. We have not yet been specific about cross-country services, or the central division of Regional Railways, because, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, Regional Railways, and, to some extent, cross-country services, are run on artificial boundaries. We want to ensure that we provide the right geographic description or boundary of specific services. There is no hidden agenda for the cessation of cross-country services. They are part of the present pattern of railway services and we intend to franchise those lines.

It is important to consider the purpose of the new clause. Today, my right hon. Friend has announced 26 fairly large franchises. If a franchise comes to an end, it does not mean that the franchising director must look at alternatives. That is not possible when one considers the east coast main line, the London-Tilbury-Southend line or lines to Wales and the south-west. We are discussing large franchises.

Where open-access services are developed in the coming years, they may provide a satisfactory, unsubsidised, unfranchised service. The franchising director might consider that those routes—perhaps they would operate in those parts of the country to which reference has already been made—provide a satisfactory service. It might then be considered unnecessary to franchise that part of a much larger franchise.

Mr. Wallace: I welcome the fact that the Minister said that he wanted the west coast main line, as well as that on the east coast, to be successful. How is that likely to happen, given that the line will be starved of investment? The £150 million that the Minister mentioned represents about one third of the tender price for new rolling stock on the west coast main line, a tender which British Rail had to allow to lapse last year. How does he expect that line to be successful if it does not have the investment to allow that to happen?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that British Rail, Railtrack and the successor franchisees cannot do everything at once. The east coast main line has

[Mr. Freeman]

benefited from a successful investment project worth up to £450 million. Network SouthEast has benefited from upwards of £700 million of investment on the Kent link. Attention must now be turned to the west coast main line. We have announced that the private sector has put forward propositions to improve the infrastructure. The private sector, working with the public sector, can help to advance the date of completion of works. Already, British Rail plans to start soon on resignalling the west coast main line, and I welcome that. I am determined that new, modern rolling stock should come on to that line, which is the premier line in Britain's railway infrastructure, as soon as possible.

11.30 pm

Mr. Prescott: That is a sound bite.

Mr. Freeman: It is not a sound bite, it is the truth. The west coast main line is our most important rail artery. Its services will continue to run to Glasgow and north of Glasgow. Investment is coming to the line and privatisation will advance that. I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Wilson: That is a good saying: "It is not a sound bite, it is the truth." That may be the first confession by a politician that the two are incompatible.

Two of the Minister's statements cannot be allowed to go unchecked. He said that InterCity was a success. In that case, why not leave it alone and let it develop? He then said that he could confirm that the Government want the brand name to continue. InterCity is not a shell. It is not livery and a brand name. It is not a marketing concept alone. It is about people who have worked hard to make it what it is—a profitable railway company. Why cannot it be left to do that job, dependent as it is on internal cross-subsidy?

The Minister did not give us one rational reason for separating from InterCity the profitable elements so as to create, overnight, a whole new railway that will have to be subsidised if it is to survive in anything like its present form. Where is the virtue in that? I cannot see where that comes from in my philosophy and I find it odd that it is part of Tory philosophy to create new businesses that are dependent on public subsidy instead of profitable ones that stand on their own feet.

The Minister told us that the new clause was based on a hypothesis of future open access. I doubt whether anyone believes that we shall ever see the open access proposals come to fruition, but if this is to do with open access, such a provision could be written into existing clauses. The new clause is far too convenient for the Government, because they are getting a device by which InterCity routes can be pruned, to be replaced by feeder services. It distresses and disappoints me that not one Tory Member representing the areas that will be threatened by the clause has got to his feet to lodge concerns which, at the very least, are justified by inclusion of the clause in the Bill.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 214, Noes 109.

Division No. 280] **[11.33 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Booth, Hartley
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs. Angela
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey

Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Mackinlay and
Mr. Andrew Mitchell.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Etherington, Bill
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McCartney, Ian
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Hugh Bayley and
Mr. Alan Meale.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 15

PERFORMANCE OF FRANCHISING DIRECTOR'S DUTIES TO SECURE THE PROVISION OF SERVICES ETC.

'.—(1) Where the Franchising Director is under a duty to secure the provision of any services or the operation of the whole or any part of a network, station or light maintenance depot, he may perform that duty by entering into agreements or arrangements under which other persons (in this section referred to as "sub-contractors") are to provide the services or, as the case may be, operate the network, station or light maintenance depot, or the part of the network, station or light maintenance depot, in question.

(2) The Franchising Director may enter into an agreement or arrangement such as is mentioned in subsection (1) above notwithstanding that the sub-contractor in question is a company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director.

(3) Any agreement or arrangement such as is mentioned in subsection (1) above may include such provisions, including provision with respect to the fares or other charges that may be imposed by the sub-contractor in question, as the Franchising Director may think fit.

(4) Any sums required by the Franchising Director for the purpose of performing any such duty as is mentioned in subsection (1) above shall be paid by the Secretary of State out of money provided by Parliament.

(5) Any sums received by the Franchising Director in consequence of the performance of any such duty as is mentioned in subsection (1) above shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 21

FAILURE TO SECURE SUBSEQUENT FRANCHISE AGREEMENT

'.—(1) In any case where—

(a) a franchise agreement is terminated or otherwise comes to an end, but

(b) no further franchise agreement has been entered into in respect of services formerly provided under that franchise agreement,

it shall, subject to subsection (2) below, be the duty of the Franchising Director to secure the provision of those services until such time as they again begin to be provided under a franchise agreement.

(2) Subsection (1) above does not—

(a) require the Franchising Director to secure the provision of any services, if and to the extent that, in his opinion, adequate alternative railway passenger services are available;

(b) preclude him from giving notice under subsection (3) of section 33 below in relation to any of the services in question, in which case his duty under this section to secure the provision of the services to which the notice relates will (subject to subsections (3) and (4) of that section) terminate on the day specified in the notice in pursuance of paragraph (b) of that subsection; or

(c) preclude him from ceasing to secure the provision of any of the services in question, if the discontinuance is certified by the Regulator as being a minor closure, within the meaning of that section.'.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 17

PAYMENTS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE IN RESPECT OF TRACK ACCESS CHARGES IN CONNECTION WITH RAILWAY GOODS SERVICES

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may, for the purpose of securing the provision of adequate services for the carriage of goods by railway, enter into agreements with goods service operators under which he undertakes to make payments to the goods service operator in question in respect of all or any part of the track access charges which may be incurred by the goods service operator in connection with the provision of the services to which the agreement relates.

(2) The Secretary of State shall not enter into an agreement by virtue of subsection (1) above unless he is satisfied that benefits of a social or environmental nature are likely to result from the provision of those services for the carriage of goods by railway to which the agreement relates.

(3) Any sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments under agreements entered into by virtue of this section shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament.

(4) In this section—

"goods service operator" means a person who operates services for the carriage of goods by railway;

"track access charge" means any payment required to be made under an access agreement conferring a right to use track;

and expressions used in this section and in Part I above have the same meaning in this section as they have in that Part.'.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

11.45 pm

Mr. MacGregor: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendment No. 73.

Mr. MacGregor: This is the only Report stage debate on freight, and at this hour of night I will be brief. It is unfortunate that we could not have had the debate earlier, because the freight aspects of our proposals are most important. Our purpose is to deal with an issue that has faced nearly every country around the world. Over the years, the volume of freight taken on rail as a proportion of inland freight has markedly declined. We are not unusual in that. Last week, I published the Government's proposals on "Rail Freight Privatisation", which on page 5 presents a table that shows the share of freight moved by rail compared with other modes.

In Great Britain the figure is 7·2 per cent.; in France, 8·5 per cent.; western Germany, 8·7 per cent.; the Netherlands, 2·5 per cent.; Belgium, 12·7 per cent.; and Spain, 2·4 per cent. Although those figures do not show the movement over the years, they clearly indicate that rail freight accounts for a small proportion of the total. The Government's objective is to halt that decline and to move freight back on to rail.

There are three major reasons for that trend. First, the kind of bulk freight for which rail is most suited is itself a declining market. Secondly, the expanding market for consumer goods freight are just-in-time deliveries to supermarkets and so on—where the requirement is to shift comparatively small amounts every day to individual supermarkets, with prompt delivery. That is normal commercial practice, and all the developments are in that direction. Rail is not particularly well suited to competing with road for that sort of freight, and it must improve in order to do so.

Thirdly, a key issue in the competitiveness and viability of rail is its suitability for transporting freight over long distances—and almost inevitably, we do not have as many as other countries. The same table that I quoted earlier shows that the average length of haul in Great Britain is 113 miles, compared with 154 in France, 249 in western Germany, and 367 in Italy. However, I believe that the channel tunnel offers an opportunity to overcome that distance problem, to make rail freight more viable. That is why there is such a concentration of investment by British Rail at this time.

I have never hidden the fact during the past year that it will be a big challenge to shift more freight back to rail, but I believe that our proposals—some of which were contained in the document that I published last week—offer the best package of opportunities in offering a combination of selling rail freight to the private sector, open access, breaking British Rail's monopoly, and enabling more freight operators to offer individual services or multiple services.

Also included is the three-point package that I presented on Second Reading. That brings me to new clause 17, which honours my undertaking on Second Reading to bring forward provisions to allow the payment of grants to rail freight operators in respect of track access charges. They seek to tip the balance in favour of rail over road where that is economically and viably sensible. Grant will be triggered only where there are demonstrable social and environmental benefits.

At this time of night, I do not propose to go into all the details. I am happy to do so, if that is required during the debate. All I would say at this stage is that the new clause provides for new track grants for goods operations. Therefore, I commend it to the House. It is a modest new grant. It is designed to deal with those marginal rail freight flows that cannot fully pay their way, and where track costs are the problem.

However, taken as part of the package which I have briefly outlined, I believe that it offers the best opportunity for getting more freight off the roads and on to rail and, in particular, of halting the decline in the carriage of freight by rail. That is something to which everybody subscribes but which has proved very difficult to achieve in practice. I believe that our proposals, of which this is part, offer the best opportunity.

Mr. Prescott: Like the Secretary of State, I feel that the debate on freight warrants more time than it is likely to get because of the pressures of time at this late hour. I do not disagree fundamentally with the Government's approach. I have argued for it for 20 years, even against a Labour Government. We are now beginning to witness the acceptance in this country of a social freight system—acceptance that subsidies should be used to encourage the movement of freight from road to rail. There has been some movement in the past few years as a result of the

section 8 provision—but not enough. It has not made up for the difference between the costs of moving freight by road compared with rail.

No matter how effective these provisions may be—we hope that they will be effective—the reality is that most freight traffic—85 per cent., or even more—will always be carried by road. A 1 per cent. increase in total freight traffic is the equivalent of almost double what is carried by rail at this time. Road traffic is increasing by 1 per cent. a year, anyway.

The road versus rail argument has always been a nonsense. We should use both road and rail capacity as best we can. There is considerable congestion on our roads. It is agreed that we shall be unable to build our way out of that problem and that we should use rail more effectively than we do now.

Past policy has not been right in one particular respect: that freight should be expected to achieve an 8 per cent. rate of return. It has been difficult for British Rail operators to achieve that return. One difficulty facing British Rail is that its rolling stock, particularly engines, is very old. British Rail freight is often pulled by two or three engines, on account of their age. It was one of the reasons that led me to accept that private sector capital should be made available to British Rail for freight. I have never had an ideologial problem over that.

British Rail's need for capital is so great that if private sector companies, such as English China Clays, are prepared to provide resources to take that traffic off the roads and put it on to rail, it is a good investment for the community. It is far more expensive to build roads than to use fully, by means of subsidy, the rail capacity that is already available.

There have been a number of examples, but a simple change from public to private resources does not guarantee overnight success. English China Clays ran into problems when Tiger Rail moved into Scotland. That was a private operation. It went bankrupt. Rail Charter, another private company, is another example. There is no guarantee, I repeat, that private operations will be a success. Those examples perhaps reflect the difficulties of the times.

My point is, perhaps, an ideological one: that a change of ownership does not necessarily guarantee that there will be a movement from road to rail. We spend far too long arguing about whether "public" means only public money and public use and about whether "private" means privately owned, effective use being made only of private capital. That is not the case.

British Rail has been judged a little unfairly. Its long-haul freight, particularly the movement of coal and steel, has been in massive decline, for reasons that are known to the House. Its merry-go-round trains were in advance of rail investment in most other parts of the country. It has a good record on through haul.

One of the problems of moving a large amount of traffic from the road to rail is that one cannot always guarantee that the traffic will be in trainloads. Trainloads are cheap but much traffic is in wagonloads. It is very expensive to operate a wagonload system and we must recognise that there are financial problems in attracting traffic from the roads and on to the rail.

The irony is that the Government's own proposals, with the enforcement of the expected rates of return which they have increased in the past 12 months, have forced British Rail to ditch more traffic. We have mentioned cider, cement and other products, trainloads of which are being chased off the railways and on to the roads. That is unfortunate. Indeed, it is silly that the resources which will be available under the new rules are not made readily available to British Rail by the Secretary of State. He could ensure that they are, although there was some dispute about the issue on Second Reading.

There is nothing to stop the Secretary of State making changes under section 8 to increase the subsidy in order to retain the traffic which is currently moved by rail and which the private sector wishes to keep on the railway but which is increasingly being forced on to the roads. It would be sad if traffic were moved back on to the railway once the orders are introduced. Why cannot the Secretary of State take the necessary action now? It would be welcomed by all involved.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): My hon. Friend is making a fundamental point. With the new clause, the Government are apparently attempting to do something that they refused to do under public ownership. Perhaps my hon. Friend will confirm that.

As this is the Report stage, will my hon. Friend mention some elementary points which have not come across in public print? On what basis will Railtrack charge for freight traffic which will presumably be originated by anyone who can offer the stock and locomotives for a particular service? Will it be in the hands of the accountants, or will it be subject to marginal cost pricing? It is possible that there could be an increase in freight traffic merely through the accountants' use of figures.

Mr. Prescott: There is a great deal in what my hon. Friend says. It brings to mind an experience of the railway system in my area of Hull, which led me to argue with the Labour Government of the time that their view that there should be no subsidy for freight, and the accounting rules affecting the operation of the freight system, were nonsense.

Freightliner which operated from Hull provided a network service to a major port. It was desperately short of cash and wanted a Freightliner crane in York to be moved to Liverpool, but it was unable to get the Treasury to give it increased resources or to raise its borrowing requirement and so began to cannibalise the system. It argued that it needed to move the crane. It made sense from Freightliner's point of view but it meant that the community was going to lose a freight service.

When I approached the then Labour Minister, he argued that a subsidy could be given only to the passenger service, not to freight. It sounded like a fair principle and I understood why he said what he did, but the consequence was that we lost the freight service and the line lost revenue. By losing revenue, and because the Government were prepared to increase the subsidy for passengers, the community ended up paying more in passenger subsidy and losing a freight service. In my view, the community lost because more traffic went on to the roads and we paid more in subsidy because we believed in subsidies for passengers but not for freight.

The new clause raises the possibility that subsidies can be used, a notion in which I have always believed. I am glad that the Secretary of State is introducing the idea, although I could not convince the Labour Government at that time that they should consider it. It is a sound idea. Like many of my ideas, the Government have got around

[Mr. Prescott]

to picking it up so I can hardly vote against them on this occasion. We hope that it will have the desired effect, although I am a little doubtful.

We must wait and see what the total costs are because one of the difficulties with the Government's thinking now is the track costs. Railtrack, an independent body, may be expected to make an 8 per cent. rate of return. For an independent body which is presently in the public sector but earmarked to go into the private sector, that rate of return, or whatever rate is expected, means that the costs will be considerable and that they will be imposed on the operator. The Government say that the new grant under the new clause is geared to dealing with that track cost. I hear from operators that they have some doubt about that; I hope that they are wrong. We need to know many more details.

12 midnight

I have seen the complicated formulae which are available in the consultative documents on the matter. I do not know whether the Secretary of State understands them. I am not sure that I understand them although I have tried to do so on a number of occasions. We shall have to see some examples before we can have a full understanding. The bottom line seems to be that the Government are prepared to pay subsidies for anything that is not operating costs. The operators are expected to provide the fuel and the running costs, but subsidies could make up the difference between what the commercial provider is prepared to give—*[Interruption.]* I thought that I heard a different view being expressed in the official Box. As the House moved from passenger to freight services, a new group of civil servants walked in. I have often thought that it would have been nice in the past few days to have had different advisers to give us advice on different matters.

The complexity of the system is such that everything will depend on how much money is made available. As I understand the Secretary of State, there was to be a limit on the amount of subsidy available which has now been removed. Presumably, whatever money is given and by whom will be part of the public expenditure round and will have to be negotiated and readily available each year. Is there a limit? Could the Secretary of State give us some idea of the estimates he has on that? Presumably the money will be governed by Treasury rules about the amount that can be lent. I assume that the money will be part of the PSBR. Could the Secretary of State tell us? Alongside that, we must put the £1 billion-plus of PSO payments—a figure that we all agree will continue. Having followed a policy over the past years of saying how the PSO has been halved and how that has been a great success, the Government now propose to double the amount and they crow that that is a success policy. Whatever, we are back to the figure of £1 billion at which we started at the beginning of the 10-year period, despite the different policies of different Ministers. Do we now expect £1 billion of subsidies on the freight side? Has the Secretary of State any idea of the order of magnitude or resources that will be available to meet the requirements? As he can understand, that could double the leading requirement and the subsidies given by the Treasury to the railway sector in both passenger and freight operations.

Has the Secretary of State given any thought to an idea that was suggested to me and to other hon. Members by Railstore? It is an interesting idea about which many of the operators will be thinking. If there is to be competition between rail and road, and if we seek through the grants to make the competition fairer, the judgment will be made —as it is now—that what those at the Department of Transport who are responsible for investment in roads impose as a road tax is a contribution to costs. There is some argument about whether the full costs are met; I shall leave that to one side at present.

The structure is that the Department of Transport imposes the so-called "tax" on lorries; Railtrack is the equivalent body on the rail side. It could impose a charge, which might vary. It does not vary on the roads, where there is a charge for a particular size of vehicle. Railstore talks about a 44-tonne lorry—all the signs are that that is the size to which we are moving. The road fund licence for a 40-ft lorry that carries 24 tonnes is £2,160. Railstore suggests that the charge for the 24 tonnes that a railway wagon can carry should be £2,160. If Railtrack and the Department of Transport were seen as comparable bodies which raised money by some form of tax—either a road or a rail fund tax—those would, Railstore believes, be fair amounts. I do not know.

Has the Secretary of State given any consideration to comparability? The suggestions are concerned with trying to level the field of competition and with intervening to try to get more traffic off the roads and on to rail. Is the Secretary of State considering that or, under the massive bureaucracy that we are establishing through Railtrack, will each company bid for its own contract? The latter seems to be what the Secretary of State is suggesting and I wonder whether he is happy with that kind of bureaucracy.

Under new clause 17, a new subsidy will be paid to meet different charges. Although the problems involved in the new subsidy may be considerable, I believe that this is a welcome development.

Although the Secretary of State did not mention it because he was pressed for time, I welcome the extension of section 8 grants. It makes a great deal of sense to extend those grants to traffic that has affected the environment. We must consider the effect on congestion on our motorways. I have argued for some time that apart from the immediate roads around the point of origin of the traffic, the proposal is worthwhile in respect of traffic heading south via the M25 or the M6. If we can get traffic to stay on the railways, particularly on the way to Europe, that will relieve congestion on the M25 and the M6.

I am glad that the Government have accepted the extension of the grants to assist traffic moving by rail. I also welcome the fact that the grant is to be extended for locomotives, sidings, wagons and terminal handling equipment. That makes a lot of sense.

My main complaint is why all that could not be available to British Rail. Why can we make all those grants and facilities available as soon as the railways enter the private sector? Is it to make the ideological point that the private sector can do it better? That has nothing to do with private entrepreneurial ability. It is fixing the system to provide the benefits which were denied to British Rail in the public sector. That is a load of ideological nonsense.

We should ignore the ideology and consider how the community can get more traffic from the road on to the

railways through the best use of its financial facilities and so reduce congestion costs and environmental damage and therefore best use our under-utilised facilities.

I welcome the fact that we are moving towards a PSO for freight. We should consider road and passenger and freight and passenger in the light of PSO and try to get more traffic off the roads and on to the railways.

I have taken advice, and although I do not accept it fully, I will accept it for the sake of this argument, that the grants that the Secretary of State is offering would not have prevented the current movement of traffic from rail to road. It is said that the grants would not even have covered operating costs. That is an interesting point, but it does not take us very far, particularly when we consider traffic from Abersystwyth and Oban where oil is now being transferred from rail to road simply because the operating costs are not being covered.

I hope that we can accept that the idea is to try to keep what traffic we have on the railways and, at the same time, try to encourage more. There are many examples of that. I have already referred to oil, but cement and cider in different areas of the country also prove my case.

We must recognise that there may be some deficiencies in what the Government are doing at the moment, but largely they are moving in the right direction. I do not necessarily accept the involvement of the private sector, but open access causes me no problems if it improves the amount of available capital and investment. If it improves the movement from road to rail and uses our railways to the full, that is acceptable in view of the many difficulties that the railways face. My only objection is why we have to wait until the system is privatised. Why not give BR the opportunity to do all that now?

Sir David Mitchell: I rise to support the new clause and to ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State a few questions. There is widespread support throughout the country for the concept of transporting more goods by rail than by road. As my right hon. Friend said, the channel tunnel will help. The old section 8 provided capital grants to assist in that transfer. I have to plead guilty that when I had some responsibility in that area I spent more public money under section 8 than any Minister has ever done.

New clause 17 allows the Secretary of State to pay all or part of the track usage charges that go to a freight operator. That is a far more important and wide-reaching change than the public have recognised. It is perhaps a pity that the debate is taking place shortly after midnight. I should have liked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to take the opportunity of blowing his trumpet and telling the freight hauliers, environmental pressure groups, the town centre conservation groups and the public at large just how important is the initiative that he is now taking to help that transfer of freight from road to rail.

If the Government intend to subsidise the transfer from road to rail, we need to know the answer to some questions. What are the criteria to be? My right hon. Friend spoke of a demonstrable benefit. Could he perhaps explain a little further what a demonstrable benefit is? Will it relate purely to congestion on the roads? Will such benefits include pre-empting the need to build new roads? Will it be taken into account that pressure of lorry traffic causes environmental damage in conservation areas? Could we have a little more information about the criteria that the Secretary of State will use? How much has my right hon. Friend budgeted to spend? Can he assure me that section 8 will continue? Although its purpose is similar, it operates in a different way in the form of capital grants.

The public are seized of the fact that there is not a level playing field between the road haulier and rail transport. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) drew attention to the proposition from Railstore Ltd. which has been circulated to several hon. Members. It asks simply why we do not charge for a rail freight truck the same as would be charged for an equivalent weight road freight truck in the form of a licence and use section 17 if that is too heavy a charge which needs to be remitted to achieve the Secretary of State's desire to achieve a transfer of freight from road to rail.

I support what is proposed in the new clause, but could my right hon. Friend spell out a little more information to the House?

Mr. Harris: I do not know whether it is because we have just passed the witching hour of midnight or whether the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has mellowed in recent times, but I find myself in agreement with many of the points that he made.

I believe that British Rail has thrown away much of its freight traffic, perhaps deliberately or perhaps because of circumstances. I had occasion in the past three weeks to write to Sir Bob Reid about what I regard as perhaps the supreme illustration of the way in which British Rail has thrown away its freight traffic. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) and I have received letters suggesting that British Rail was using road transport to take its fuel to Long Rock depot in my constituency to fuel its trains.

I asked Sir Bob how, if British Rail could not use its own rail service to move its fuel, it could expect anyone else to use rail freight services. He wrote back a nice letter in which he said that the economics were such that it was not feasible for British Rail to move its fuel by rail. That make the point that rail freight is not used because freight services, certainly in the south-west, have been run down to the point of non-existence.

My constituents look back with nostalgia to the days when the fish from Newlyn went on trains and the broccoli —that is cauliflower to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but in Cornwall it is called broccoli—was transported in special trains. At this time of year, trainload after trainload ran from the branch lines through Helston to Gwinear road and through west Cornwall to the markets.

Now all that has gone, and I do not think that we can put the clock back, sad though that may be. However, I welcome the new clause, in the hope that we may be able to save some services.

It is a sad fact of life that, in recent times, Royal Mail parcel service traffic has been lost completely in my part of the world and, I suspect, many others. Similarly, newspaper trains have disappeared in the south-west. That is very sad. I hope that we will be able to regain some freight traffic. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East rightly referred to the position that, happily, still applies to china clay; let us hope that we hang on to that rail traffic.

I believe that we have opportunities to return some freight to rail, despite the obvious advantage of road transport for many commodities. I welcome new clause 17, which tries to do that, and I wish my right hon. Friend's laudable objectives every success.

[Mr. Harris]

When I wrote to Sir Bob Reid, Cornwall 2000 said, "Ah: the reason why British Rail is now switching transport of its own fuel to the roads is all to do with privatisation." That is not true; in fact, it is already happening under the present system. I believe that new clause 17 may provide at least a glimmer of hope that more freight will be returned from road to rail, and I wish my right hon. Friend every success in that endeavour.

12.15 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I add my support to this environmental measure, which—as the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) pointed out—is a welcome development of the section 8 grant provision. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) for all the work that he did as a Minister; I looked with admiration from my roads desk at what he was doing on the railways. Although there are few instances in which a grant by itself will make it possible to avoid building a road, there are many instances in which it will bring about an environmental improvement, especially in the localities where the goods start out or end up.

I think that it would be sensible for those proposing to give up such grants to, in effect, auction them: instead of saying, "We will not continue to use the railways unless we receive an ever-growing sum", they should ask what sort of sum is available and what kind of bid people will put in to try to transfer some of their traffic from road to rail or to stay on rail. That is the only way in which to achieve competition; otherwise, we shall end up with an open-ended subsidy, as we have in other contexts.

Let me end by making a prediction. As those involved in moving freight say that they do not need a road through Oxleas wood, I forecast that it will not be built.

Mr. MacGregor: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply briefly to the debate.

I am very grateful for the positive response that the new clause has received from hon. Members on both sides of the House. We have had a short but realistic debate: while we all want more freight to be transported by rail—I strongly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) on that—we also know that it will be difficult to achieve and that we need a package to give us the opportunity of achieving it.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) for what he said. Let me quickly answer his questions. He asked about the size of the subsidy and whether it would be open ended. From the point of view of the beneficiary, subsection (2) of the new clause makes it clear that it is not open ended; payment will be triggered only when there are demonstrable social and environmental benefits. As for the total amounts, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that they will have to be negotiated each year as part of the public expenditure round. At this stage we have no clear facts on which to build estimates of what will be needed, but it will clearly have to be part of the public expenditure negotiations in the autumn and the White Paper.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the welcome that he gave to the other parts of the package—the freight facilities grant and the potential move to 44-tonne lorries for combined transport movements to railheads. I say potential because we went out to consultation on that issue and I am now evaluating all the responses. Clearly, we hope to implement that move. The hon. Gentleman suggested that there was an element of ideology in that move as we were proposing the package only as we moved towards privatising the freight section of railways. That is not true; the move was made as a result of my analysis of the problems of freight in the past year.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me about some freight operations that are no longer being continued on rail because the contracts involved were not even covering the operating costs. He is right about that and under the proposal the grant will be available to cover track access costs, not operating costs, which must be right. That partly answers my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). It is true that some contracts have been lost in the past year—they did not even cover their operating costs, let alone their track costs. To put the figure in context, last year it involved about 3 per cent. of the volume of trainload freight, and some new contracts have been awarded in the past year.

My heart sank when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East started talking about Railstore and level playing fields. It sank only because I realised that to do justice to the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman would take about an hour and I am sure that the House would not wish me to speak for that long at this time of night. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has responded to a number of requests from colleagues in the House on the Railstore analysis.

The level playing field argument is complex and I shall not enter into it tonight except to say that the Green Paper on motorways and the possibilities for private finance which, as the House knows, I shall soon be producing contains a fairly long analysis of the level playing fields issue. The hon. Gentleman will see that it is complicated and that the simple comparison made by Railstore does not do justice to the argument.

Mr. Spearing: The Secretary of State will appreciate that the issue of freight, and its increase, is vital to increasing the finances of the railway network, whatever it may comprise. On what basis will the future track cost of freight be calculated? He has explained the disastrous present position of fuel being taken by road, even for British Rail, due to the fact that it cannot cover its track costs. If there is to be a minimum timetable—which he said that there would be for passenger traffic—will the marginal costs of the additional track costs for the freight that may use those routes be the basis of the charge? If not, what is the basis to be? Unless we know that, the degree to which the subsidy will help remains unknown.

Mr. MacGregor: The issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives did not relate to track costs, but to the fact that the contractors were not even covering their operating costs, which is a problem. On the issue of track costs, we have stated the broad principles for access charges. I do not wish to speak on the subject in detail now, but the relevant document is freely available to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. The relevant point in relation to the new clause is that it enables up to 100 per cent. of the track costs to be met where there are clear social and environmental benefits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West asked how the environmental benefits would

be evaluated. Officials in the Department are currently drawing up the administrative guidelines that will govern the new grant regime, including the methodology for evaluating environmental benefits. I envisage that the guidelines will be similar to those that apply to the current freight facilities grant scheme, with environmental benefits measured in terms of reduced lorry miles. All applications will also be subject to a financial appraisal and there will be safeguards against fraud. I note the comments of my hon. Friend, who has always shown an interest in the subject. I will ensure that he receives the details as soon as they are available.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 18

EXERCISE OF FUNCTIONS FOR PURPOSE OF ENCOURAGING INVESTMENT IN THE RAILWAYS

'.—(1) The Franchising Director or a Passenger Transport Authority or Passenger Transport Executive—

(a) in exercising or deciding whether or not to exercise any of his, or (as the case may be) their, franchising functions, may take into account the desirability of encouraging railway investment; and

(b) may exercise any such functions for the purpose of encouraging railway investment or for purposes which include that purpose.

(2) The Franchising Director may, for the purpose of encouraging railway investment, enter into agreements with any person under which the Franchising Director undertakes to exercise franchising functions of his or to exercise such functions in a particular manner.

(3) The Franchising Director and any Passenger Transport Executive may enter into agreements with each other as to the terms on which franchise agreements to which the Executive is to be a party are to be entered into.

(4) In this section—

"franchising functions", in relation to the Franchising Director, means—

(a) any functions of his under sections 15, 17, 20 to 30, *(Transfers of franchise assets and shares)*, *(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement)*, *(Contracts between the Franchising Director and the Board for the provision of non-franchised railway passenger services)* and *(Powers of the Franchising Director to form and finance companies and to acquire and dispose of assets)* (3);

(b) any power conferred on him under or by virtue of Part II below with respect to the effecting by transfer scheme of any transfer contemplated by any provision of those sections; and

(c) any other functions of his which relate to the provision of railway passenger services under franchise agreements;

"franchising functions", in relation to a Passenger Transport Authority or Passenger Transport Executive, means any functions conferred or imposed on the Authority or, as the case may be, the Executive under or by virtue of section 29 above;

"railway investment" means investment in assets for use in the provision of railway services.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I suggest to the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) that, because this is such an important subject, I send him a copy of the full statement that I intend to make next Thursday, in the recess, which brings together all the initiatives on leasing. Perhaps he and I can then have an Adjournment debate on the West Yorkshire PTE rolling stock issue because the way forward on that may be charted more clearly as a result of the statement that I shall make next Thursday, assuming that the new clause is accepted.

Mr. Prescott: I am all for doing things for the convenience of the House, but the statement on leasing is important. We are now being told that the statement cannot be made in the House because hon. Members want to go home. I understand the argument. Labour Members do not have to stay for the vote. We cannot win in the House. If we want to let those hon. Members go who do not want to vote, we can stay and talk. Then we are told that we cannot have a statement now because hon. Members want to go home, but we will have it next week when we are in recess. Frankly, that is not acceptable. We are supposed to subject the Minister's statements to examination. I am fed up with a Department that constantly gives statements outside and not in the House. Even the objectives for British Rail are no longer given in the House—they are announced outside.

I have been told that there is an important development on the issue of leasing. As hon. Members know, I have been an advocate of financed leasing for a long time. When this Government and the last Labour Government would not accept it, I thought that at least I would have had an opportunity in the House to see how this Government approach the issue of leasing. *[Interruption.]* This is important. I hope that the Government Whip does not keep making that sort of face. I am all for the organisation of business. I am not saying that we should have an hour's debate, but we should have at least five or 10 minutes because leasing is important. It gives us an opportunity to deal with the real problems of finance in British Rail. It cannot be achieved by simply getting finance from the Treasury—it must come some other way.

We will not have an opportunity to hear any statement. Does that mean that the Minister does not have a statement, or that he is thinking about it? If he has it, why does not he make it to us tonight so that we can go away and at least read it? Then I would not need to wait until the recess because I hate giving press statements on what Ministers have said. What does the Minister intend to do?

Mr. Freeman: If I catch your eye again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be happy to go into detail.

Mr. Prescott: I am not asking the Minister for the statement—I am trying to get a proper balance, as the Secretary of State did on the issue of freight. The Secretary of State wanted to make a full and proper statement about the important matter of freight, but, in five minutes, he managed to give the essential details.

I am not asking the Minister to give us the full statement on leasing. If he will give the details in a parliamentary reply, as he and the Department always do, I will put a question down tonight. He can reply to me or my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), who is being pressed not to get into this debate. Can we find a happy compromise, because there is a fair point to be made? We must get a balance on this matter which is not being achieved at present.

The Minister could give us one or two points to show his position on leasing and then make his written statement later. If he did that, I could at least address some

[Mr. Prescott]

of my criticisms of his essential points because, while I agree with leasing, certain points need to be made in the debate. I do not know how to deal with the matter now because the Minister has sat down and I have said my bit. He must have the leave of the House and God knows what else if he wants to speak again. I am prepared to give way to him for a few minutes so that he can outline his principles for leasing.

Mr. Freeman: New clause 18 deals specifically with the issue of the franchising director fettering his discretion, essentially, by agreeing to the continued use of leased rolling stock on a particular railway line through the first franchise. That is all that the new clause does.

The problem in the past has been that franchises might be for five, seven or 10 years, but the economic life of new rolling stock might be 30 years. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the new clause will allow the franchising director to develop an operating lease by saying to the franchisee, the lessor and to the PTE—perhaps all of them joined by a legal agreement—that he will undertake to continue to designate the leased rolling stock as franchise assets on a specific line beyond the first franchise. The franchises are for seven years, and the period for two franchises, 14 years, is about the minimum rental length that lessors will require on rolling stock to reduce the residual value to an acceptable risk. That is all that the new clause does and it has been widely welcomed.

12.30 am

I told the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) that on Thursday I shall seek to bring together not new policy statements, but the various policy statements that we have made about the establishment of public sector rolling stock companies, the £150 million of lease finance for British Rail, and the time scale for decisions on that facility and one that may or may not replace it. I owe it to the House to set out clearly in one document all the statements that we have made so far.

There is a real possibility of developing a rolling stock leasing market, but we have to transfer the risk to the private sector to ensure that it is not caught by public expenditure constraints. I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman has been a great supporter of leasing. I have differed from him, largely because he thinks that it is possible for British Rail as a nationalised industry to lease rolling stock and not be caught by conventional public expenditure definitions. That is not possible. This is the way forward and I look forward to debating the matter at much greater length—perhaps for the full time of an Adjournment debate or on some other occasion. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to debate specific issues, but I sense that the mood of the House is to move to other matters. I am not afraid to stay here all night to answer every question that hon. Members put to me. I am trying to observe the niceties of debate and endeavouring to be courteous by being as concise as possible.

Mr. Prescott: The Minister says that he would stay here all night. I hope that that means more than it did on Stagecoach rail when he launched a service and then shot into the sleeping section.

The Minister has made an important statement. I look forward to his written comments and hope that we can have a longer debate in the future. I welcome the Government's return to leasing. Years ago there were leasing arrangements for British Rail and I served on the Committee that investigated British Rail's use of those arrangements. BR abused them, and that is why the Treasury took them away. British Rail sold to the private sector and used the money that was raised and other tax arrangements for the revenue and running requirements of the railways. The resources should have been used for capital replacement, but BR was starved of cash at that time.

British Rail was able to lease as a publicly owned company, which shows that the Treasury has different rules for different industries at different times. The publicly owned British Airways was able to lease aeroplanes and there was no problem in dealing with that. The Treasury has never been consistent on this matter and policy depends on what the Treasury thinks is important at the time. BR has been denied the possibility of any further leasing.

The Government's attitude now is a welcome change. I am not sure that the Minister is right when he says that the public sector cannot lease. Every other railway system in Europe leases and they are publicly owned. Treasury rules in Britain are different. It is not that public finance cannot be organised to allow the public sector to raise its capital requirements on lease. A silly British rule makes us feel superior to the French, whose railway system has got the better part of the deal, as President Mitterrand reminded us only last week.

Even if the Minister sets up separate leasing companies, presumably they will be subsidiaries of British Rail. If so, under the normal Treasury rules, they will still be subjected to the PSBR rules and the external financial limits. How will they be free from those constraints? From what the Minister has said, I cannot see that those new companies will be subject to anything different. Those companies are intended to be the subsidiaries of a publicly owned company and, by definition, they are wholly owned by British Rail. According to the Treasury's definition, and even subject to its latest rules on private finance, those companies will be considered a public sector liability. Given what the Minister has said, I cannot understand how it is possible for those companies to be free from the restraints of public financing and the Treasury rules interpreting that financing.

I should like to consider other technical matters relating to maintenance and operational stupidities that stem from that interpretation of the Treasury rules, but, given the lateness of the hour, I shall not do so.

The Government want competition in the private sector —I do not think that there is much available—but they cannot afford to allow an operator to have a franchise for more than seven years. If a franchise were to last as long as the life of the stock, the franchisee would be given private monopoly control for perhaps 20 years.

The Government are faced with a dilemma: who owns the stock? The operator will not be prepared to invest in something for which he might have an operational contract of seven years only, especially if the asset he has purchased will hold its value for 20 years. Should he lose the contract and have to pass it on, that will place him in a difficult position. The reality is that the public sector will own that stock. I am happy about that, because it will make it all the easier for me to bring that stock back into

the sector where it belongs. If that is an ideological point, I happen to believe that 80 per cent. of the electorate agree with me.

Leaving that aside, what the Minister has said represents a welcome step forward, although I do not understand how that falls in with the supposed one great leap from the existing controls under the current interpretation of the Treasury rules.

Mr. Gunnell: I welcome new clause 18. I accept the Minister's offer of an Adjournment debate on this matter and I shall put in for one as soon as we return from the spring recess.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It would be appropriate to say something about the Government's response to the report of the Select Committee on Transport on investment in the railways. We are discussing the investment new clause which does not limit itself to investment in rolling stock.

That report noted:

"if Ministers' expectations of increased private and public sector investment in the railways are not realised it will scarcely matter what structure of ownership or management is put in place."

The Select Committee will be grateful that the Government have recognised that the provision of sufficient resources is important. In answer to the Select Committee's call for investment, however, the Government said:

"Investment in British Rail will show a temporary dip this year but it is still high in comparison with recent years. This dip is in part due to passing the peak of new rolling stock deliveries."

The Select Committee has been most concerned about the investment famine that will become apparent in the next two to three years. From discussions that the Select Committee had with witnesses, it became clear that private sector operators are unlikely to place orders for the next two years and are unlikely to receive deliveries for a year or two after that. In effect, there is a four-year gap.

Without a steady stream of orders, we will not preserve our railway stock building at the desired level. If we consider channel tunnel-linked investment and what is happening, we hope, with crossrail, Thameslink 2000, the Jubilee line extension and the fact that the 10 per cent. of British Rail stock, which is way past its sell-by date, must be replaced, we will end up with a boost in railway stock investment at a time when we have half destroyed our railway stock building industry. That is not good value for money or good for employment.

In the past nine months, we have had a great deal of discussion about how we should spend a lot of money subsidising extra jobs underground. If we spent anything like that amount of money in the next three years endowing capital investment in British Rail, we would do more for employment prospects throughout the country and make more of a contribution towards the economy than through investing underground. That would also help railways make their full economic contribution to the economic geography of the United Kingdom—Scotland, the north of England, Wales, the south-west as well as the rail links to the ports that link us to Northern Ireland.

I hope that the Government will find a way—I understand that it cannot be included in the Bill—in which to create capital investment in British Rail—I suppose that one should now say the railways—up to the level of above £1,000 million a year for the next five years.

That would be better than giving £1,000 million in the year before an election, and then cutting it to below £600 million in the years after the election. Those sudden boosts and drops are economically highly inefficient. The Government must find a way, with or without private sector help, to have a level of capital investment that ensures that the existing railway is kept at the present running speeds or, even better, increased speeds, rather than continuing the deterioration on the west coast mainline.

In their response to the investment section of the Select Committee report, the Government have said that they agree with four fifths of what the Committee said. The one fifth that is still in doubt, with the exception of British Rail bidding for franchises, is the most important part—the level of cash investment for this year, next year and the year after. If the Government could find a way to endow the railways with a high level of capital investment, they would find that their plans work, and that the bids for the franchise would be at a higher level, with very little net cost to the Government or the taxpayer. That level of capital investment—on which Ministers probably cannot give a full response tonight—will be the key to the success of their proposals.

Mr. Bayley: I agree with the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). His view was shared by hon. Members of all parties serving on the Transport Select Committee. As he said, it is vital that the Bill allows the franchising director to take note of the investment needs of the railways when issuing the terms of the franchise. To provide the sort of railway that we want and to maintain the ability to manufacture rolling stock, we need investment.

The hon. Member for Eltham proposed an investment level that needs to be secured whether the investment comes from the private sector or the public sector over the next three or four years. If that does not happen, we shall not have a railway manufacturing capacity left to provide for rail rolling stock needs towards the end of the decade. I hope that the Minister will respond to the points that have been made.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I hope that, even at this late hour, I will be forgiven if I say a few words about the new clause, which is, as my hon. Friend the Minister knows, of extreme importance to my constituency because it relates, perhaps more specifically than to any other project, to the electrification scheme for the Leeds, Bradford, Airedale and Wharfedale lines. Regrettably, I shall not be able to be here on Thursday, as I shall be away with a Select Committee, so it is important that I say something about it now.

The project has gained universal approval because not only will its result be of great benefit to people in the area but it more than met the 8 per cent. return on capital that was demanded by the Treasury. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, there was no problem in going ahead quickly with credit approval for the track electrification, but since that point, a cloud of uncertainty has hung over the provision of rolling stock. Already the scheme has made history because exceptional provision was made for leasing arrangements to be entered into and still, regrettably, problems continued to arise with the financial institutions because of the uncertainties that lay ahead.

[Mr. Gary Waller]

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for the time and energy that he has devoted to solving the problem. I know that he has made a number of visits to west Yorkshire and has worked extremely hard to try to blow away the difficulties that have arisen. I am grateful to him for introducing the new clause. I hope that it will enable new rolling stock to be running on the Airedale and Wharfedale lines sooner rather than later, because the local people deserve that.

Tribute should also be paid to the Wharfedale rail users group, which has played an important part in the process. It has access to a great deal of expertise. I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Minister has already said that the franchising director will be committed to consult user groups such as this which have an important role. I welcome the new clause, which I believe will prove extremely helpful.

12.45 am

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I shall take just one minute of the time of the House to support the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). This is potentially the most important new clause that the House will debate throughout the Bill's entire Report stage. We all want an improved railway system, but we will not get that unless there is investment in new rolling stock. The real issue is whether the new clause provides the mechanism to overcome the difficulty that the public purse simply cannot afford that. We heard what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hill, East (Mr. Prescott) said about the constraints on the public sector borrowing requirement.

I hope that in the Adjournment debate on Thursday my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport will reassure the House that the mechanism will allow for investment in rolling stock. Many of my constituents work at the ABB factory, as do many of those of the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley). My hon. Friend the Minister is aware of the great concern in York that, unless orders for new rolling stock are placed with ABB over the next two or three years, we will lose the capacity of what is undoubtedly the most modern rail workshop in Europe. That would be a tragedy.

I hope that my hon. Friend will bear those points in mind when he responds not just to this debate but to the wider issue of ensuring that there is more investment in our railways.

Mr. Cryer: I want to add to the remarks about the new clause and encouragement for investment. I want to put my comments in the context of the idea that, for some reason, the Minister should be congratulated on—and, by reflection, the Government approved for—the way that he has dealt with franchising. As I have said, the Government's playing of ideological drakes and ducks with the railways has prevented leasehold investment in new rolling stock on the Leeds-Bradford and Airedale lines. The Minister shakes his head, but he well knows that that is the case. Had it not been for the uncertainty created by the Government's privatisation proposals, the leasing of new rolling stock for the electrified railways in west Yorkshire would have been decided long ago.

The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that that uncertainty has led, for example, to a break in the ordering programme for Hunslet Engineering, which is building new rolling stock for the Birmingham area and was to build the new rolling stock for the Aire Valley and Leeds-Bradford area. As the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, it is important that there is a consistent ordering programme. Without that, skilled people will be pushed on to the dole to join the 3 million-long queue of misery created by the Government's economic policies. We will lose those vital skills. Britain has a longer history than any other nation in the building of railway engines, rolling stock and multiple units, electric and diesel. If there is not a consistent ordering programme, the necessary skills will be lost because the system of education and training will not be sustained. Indeed, that is already happening.

The new clause is by no means the panacea suggested by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller). There are real difficulties with the Aire valley and Leeds-Bradford electrification scheme. Bradford has lost a valuable trolley bus innovation scheme, which was to cost £6 million and run from the centre of Bradford to part of my constituency. It was sacrificed to produce money for the Leeds-Bradford electrification scheme. Sacrifices have been made, but not to the same extent by the Government, who should bring the matter to a certain conclusion by providing up-to-date rolling stock for what will be a modernised railway with high commuter use at peak times.

The Minister may be emollient and smooth over our discussions in his usual way, but under his smoothness beats a sturdy, right-wing heart. *[Interruption.]* His Parliamentary Private Secretary, who thinks that all BBC programmes are communist propaganda, may gurgle at that, but he is not alone this evening—he sits in a right-wing, ideological cesspit. He must take the blame.

The ideological absurdity of privatisation, as symbolised by the new clause, has brought uncertainty both to this scheme and to the railways.

Mr. Freeman: This debate has taught me a lesson: I end up answering both it and an Adjournment debate.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) asked me why leasing can develop successfully only with the private sector's involvement. If British Rail is the only possible operator, by definition it cannot write an operating lease. All leases are thus financing leases, so they are all capitalised and therefore count against public expenditure borrowing limits. Only when the new alternative of other public sector rolling stock operators opens up is it possible to write an operating lease.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) was right to underline the importance of investment in both infrastructure and rolling stock. The Government acknowledge that. For the first time, Railtrack, the infrastructure body, will have its own external financing limit and will be obliged to plan 10 years ahead. That represents an advance. At present, when there are problems, due to the recession and a fall in fare revenues, investment is postponed and BR has to live within the overdraft limit. But for the first time infrastructure investment will henceforth be dealt with separately and will be planned a long time ahead.

We look forward later this year to the announcement of Railtrack's initial EFL.

The hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) and I have had several exchanges before on the subject of rolling stock and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr.

Greenway), whose constituency I have visited, is, I know, concerned about the future of ABB and employment in the rolling stock industry. I agree that we cannot afford to lose our domestic rolling stock manufacturing capacity. If we do, in five or 10 years' time, we will end up having to place orders with the French and Germans to cope with the next genuine upswing in the investment cycle for rolling stock.

It is my responsibility to ensure that BR places the order for £150 million as quickly as possible, not in four years' time. Because BR has concentrated the orders on trains that have already been designed, they can be built quickly, either in York or by GEC, whichever it decides. They will not have to be redesigned from scratch. I have given the House an undertaking that once the order has been placed I will work on the next one. It will have to be a genuine operating lease.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and I have had exchanges before about the West Yorkshire PTE. He does not do me justice in the matter. He knows that it was a choice between the £50 million for infrastructure and an operating lease, or no project at all. I chose—I stick by my choice—the £50 million resource cover for infrastructure and tried to work with the PTE for a lease. With this group of amendments we stand a good chance—the Government, the PTE, the franchisee and the lessor all bound together in legal contracts—of ensuring that the lease is written.

I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 19

PENALTY FARES

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for and in connection with—

(a) the imposition of requirements on persons travelling by, present on, or leaving trains or stations to produce, if required to do so in accordance with the regulations, a ticket or other authority authorising them to travel by, be present on, or leave the train or station in question; and

(b) the charging of persons in breach of such requirements to financial penalties (in this section referred to as "penalty fares") in such circumstances, and subject to compliance with such conditions (if any), as may be prescribed;

and in this section any reference to a ticket or other authority of any description includes a reference to any other document which, under the regulations, is required to be produced in conjunction with any such ticket or other authority, for the purpose of demonstrating that the ticket or other authority produced by a person is valid in his case.

(2) Regulations may make provision for or with respect to—

(a) the persons who may be charged penalty fares;

(b) the persons by or on behalf of whom penalty fares may be charged;

(c) the trains and stations by reference to which penalty fares may be charged;

(d) the amount, or the greatest amount, which a person may be charged by way of penalty fare, whether a specified amount or one determined in a prescribed manner;

(e) the authorising of persons to be collectors;

(f) the manner in which charges to penalty fares may be imposed by collectors, including any requirements to be complied with by or in relation to collectors;

(g) the authorising of collectors in prescribed circumstances to require persons on trains or stations to furnish prescribed information;

(h) the display of prescribed notices in places of a prescribed description;

(j) the manner in which, and the period within which, any penalty fare charged to a person is to be paid;

(k) the issue of prescribed documents to persons who are charged, or who have paid, penalty fares;

(l) the recovery of any unpaid penalty fare as a civil debt, including provision—

(i) for or with respect to defences that are to be available in proceedings for the recovery of an unpaid penalty fare; or

(ii) for presumptions of fact to operate, in such proceedings, in favour of the person charged with the penalty fare, but subject to compliance with prescribed procedural requirements;

(m) the retention, by persons by or on behalf of whom charges to penalty fares are imposed, of sums paid by way of penalty fare;

(n) the remission of liability to pay penalty fares and the repayment of sums paid by way of penalty fare;

(o) the prevention of a person's being liable both to payment of a penalty fare and to prosecution for a prescribed offence;

(p) the imposition of prohibitions on the charging of penalty fares by or on behalf of persons who are suspected by the Secretary of State or the Regulator, on reasonable grounds, of failing to comply with such requirements imposed by or under the regulations as may be prescribed.

(3) The documents mentioned in subsection (2)(k) above include any document which consists of or includes—

(a) notice of the imposition of a charge to a penalty fare;

(b) a receipt for the payment of a penalty fare; or

(c) a ticket or other authority to travel by, be present on, or leave a train or station.

(4) Regulations may impose, or make provision for and in connection with the imposition or enforcement of, prescribed requirements in prescribed circumstances on or against a holder of a passenger licence or station licence or a passenger service operator (whether or not one by or on behalf of whom penalty fares are or are to be charged); and, without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, any such regulations may make provision with respect to—

(a) the display of notices relating to penalty fares;

(b) the provision of facilities for the issue of tickets or other authorities to travel by, be present on, or leave trains or stations;

(c) the provision of information to prescribed persons or persons of a prescribed class or description.

(5) The functions which may be conferred on the Regulator by regulations include—

(a) functions which involve the exercise by him of judgment or a discretion; and

(b) functions which empower him in prescribed circumstances to impose such conditions or requirements as he may think fit on prescribed persons or on persons of a prescribed class or description.

(6) Regulations may confer power on the Regulator to make by rules any provision which could be made by the Secretary of State by regulations, other than provision for or with respect to any matter specified in—

(a) paragraph (d), (l) or (o) of subsection (2) above; or

(b) subsection (7) below;

and any such rules shall have effect, to such extent as may be prescribed, as if they were regulations.

(7) Regulations may provide that where information is required to be furnished pursuant to the regulations—

(a) a refusal to furnish any such information, or

(b) the furnishing of information which is false in a material particular,

shall, in prescribed circumstances, be an offence punishable on summary conviction by a fine not exceeding level 2 on the standard scale.

(8) Apart from subsection (7) above, nothing in this section creates, or authorises the creation of, any offence.

(9) Regulations may make provision for any area within Great Britain and may make different provision for or in relation to different areas.

(10) Any power of the Regulator to make rules under or by virtue of this section includes power to revoke, amend or re-enact any rules so made; and—

(a) any such rules may make different provision for different cases; and

(b) without prejudice to paragraph (a) above, subsection (9) above shall apply in relation to any such rules as it applies in relation to regulations.

(11) Subsections (2) to (5) above are without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above.

(12) In this section—

"collectors" means the individuals who perform the function (whether as servants or agents or otherwise) of imposing the charge of a penalty fare on the person liable to pay it under the regulations in each particular case;

"document", without prejudice to the generality of the expression, includes any badge, token, or photograph or any other form of identification, certification or authentication;

"prescribed" means specified in, or determined in accordance with, regulations;

"regulations" means regulations under subsection (1) above;

"station" includes a reference to a part of a station;

"ticket or other authority" shall be construed in accordance with subsection (1) above;

"train" includes a reference to a part of a train;

and, subject to that, expressions used in Part I above and in this section have the same meaning in this section as they have in that Part.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Dr. Marek.

Hon. Members: Oh no!

Dr. Marek: It is all right Government Members moaning. I have been sitting quietly here listening to an interesting debate, but one that took time.

Where a ticket is not available at a station because the ticket office is closed, will there be strict conditions to ensure that—in any zone or other area where a penalty fare may be imposed on a passenger travelling without a ticket—a machine in working order will be in operation to issue an authority to travel? If such an authority is issued, can the passenger be certain of not being refused a discounted or any other ticket that might have been available at the station, had the station ticket office been open? If the Minister can give categorical assurances on those two points, we can deal with the amendment quickly.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I think that I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he seeks.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 5

CROWN APPLICATION

'.—(1) The following provisions of this Act bind the Crown—

(a) sections 15 to 19;

(b) section 43;

(c) sections 45 to 48, except sections 45(8) and 48(4) and (5);

(d) sections 49 to 52;

(e) sections 74 to 76, 79 to 82, 84 and 85;

(f) section 107, except subsections (7) and (8);

(g) section 125, so far as relating to other provisions of this Act which bind the Crown;

(h) Schedules 5, 6 and 7.

(2) Nothing in subsection (1) above so far as relating—

(a) to sections 45 to 48 above, or

(b) to section 125 above, so far as relating to those sections,

shall authorise proceedings to be brought against Her Majesty in her private capacity.

(3) Subsection (2) above shall be construed as if section 38(3) of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 (interpretation of references in that Act to Her Majesty in her private capacity) were contained in this Act.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 20

POWER TO MAKE CONSEQUENTIAL MODIFICATIONS IN OTHER ACTS ETC.

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order make such modifications of existing provisions as appear to him to be necessary or expedient in consequence of the provisions of this Act, being modifications in respect of—

(a) any reference in an existing provision to the Board or any subsidiary of the Board;

(b) any reference (in whatever terms) in an existing provision to any railway, railway service or railway undertaking;

(c) any reference (in whatever terms) in an existing provision to any person who—

(i) provides a railway service, or

(ii) carries on a railway undertaking,

or who is authorised to do so under or by virtue of any enactment;

(d) any reference in an existing provision to any enactment amended or repealed by or under this Act;

(e) any existing provision, so far as appearing to the Secretary of State to be of no further practical utility, having regard to the provisions of this Act;

(f) any other inconsistency between an existing provision and this Act.

(2) In this section—

"existing provision" means a provision contained in any Act (whether public general or local) passed, or in subordinate legislation made, before the relevant date;

"railway" has its wider meaning, within the meaning of Part I above;

"railway service" has the same meaning as in Part I above;

"the relevant date", in relation to any modification, means the date of the coming into force of the provision of this Act on which the modification is consequential;

"subordinate legislation" has the same meaning as in the Interpretation Act 1978.'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 7

CONFLICT BETWEEN DUTIES PLACED ON THE REGULATOR AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE

'(1) Where it appears to the Secretary of State or to the Regulator that, in discharging his duty regarding the exercise of the functions assigned or transferred to him under Part I of this Act, the manner best calculated for any reason or at any time under one or more of paragraphs (a) to (h) of subsection (1) of section 4 of this Act may be, to any material extent, inconsistent with his duties under any other such paragraph, he shall refer the matter to the Central Committee.

(2) The Central Committee shall consider any matter referred to it under subsection (1) above and may advise the Secretary of State or the Regulator (as the case may be) as to how, in its opinion, he should discharge his duty, having regard to all circumstances and, in the case of any advice to the Regulator, shall send a copy of that advice to the Secretary of State.

(3) The Secretary of State or the Regulator (as the case may be) shall have regard to any advice tendered by the Central Committee under subsection (2) above.

(4) Any referral under subsection (1) above may include a requirement that the Central Committee tender its advice with such time (being not less than 28 days from the date of the referral) as may be specified in the referral; and if such a requirement is not complied with, the Secretary of State or the Regulator (as the case may be) shall proceed as if the Central Committee had considered the matter but had tendered no advice.

(5) The Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament a copy of any advice received by or sent to him under subsection (2) above.'.—*[Dr. Marek.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am glad that I did not hear any moans this time.

This useful clause seeks to help the regulator, who will find himself in difficulty on a number of occasions when trying to perform the various duties imposed on him by clause 4. If the regulator has competing claims for his attention under the various subsections of clause 4, by this amendment he could appeal for advice. New clause 7 would give him the freedom to seek the advice of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee. If it is added, it would make the Bill better and help the regulator to do his or her job.

Mr. Freeman: I accept the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I do not accept the new clause. He argues that the regulator could go to the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee for advice. New clause 7, however, provides for a disputes resolution procedure, whereby if there is any disagreement between the Secretary of State and the regulator it would have to be referred to the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee. I could not agree to that, because the regulator and the Secretary of State have clearly defined separate but parallel duties. They are set out in clause 4 and other provisions of the Bill.

I am happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's recommendation that the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee should play an important part in offering advice to the regulator. It is a sensible recommendation. There should be a repository of information and experience in that committee. I underline the fact that we wish the committee to have real power and influence and a real job to do.

I am

Dr. Marek: With the permission of the House, the Minister's reply has not been altogether negative. I invite him to think about how new clause 7 could be redrafted as a result of this exchange. If he could think of a form of words by means of which the regulator could go for advice to the CRCC, perhaps he would consider tabling an appropriate amendment in another place.

There is, however, one problem. There are constraints upon what the CRCC can discuss. An amendment would be needed to allow the CRCC to give advice to the regulator. If questions relating to classes of fares were involved, there would have to be an additional amendment. The CRCC is not, as the Bill is drafted, allowed to discuss such matters.

I am pleased with the Minister's reply. Therefore, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 11

NATIONAL PLAN FOR RAILWAY SERVICES

'(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to formulate a national policy as respects the provision, maintenance and improvement of the railway network in Great Britain and from time to time to review that policy.

(2) In exercising his functions under subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability—

(a) of the policy operating in a consistent manner throughout Great Britain;

(b) of the policy being formulated early enough to enable its implementation to be achieved efficiently and to enable those with functions in relation to the provision, maintenance and improvement of railway services adequately to plan their own policies with respect to the execution of their functions.

(3) Before finally determining his policy in relation to any matter for the purposes of subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State shall engage in such consultations with those appearing to him to be representative of persons having such functions as are mentioned in subsection (2)(b) above as appear to him to be appropriate.

(4) The Secretary of State shall secure that a written report containing a summary of the policy formulated by him under subsection (1) above is prepared before the expiry of the period of twelve months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed and that subsequent reports are prepared at intervals of not more than one year.

(5) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of each report prepared under subsection (4) above before both Houses of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Rathbone.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Rathbone: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is self-explanatory. It imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to formulate, in consultation with the operators, users and others, a national rail policy for the provision, maintenance and improvement of the railway network. It would provide a consistent framework within which passenger and freight services could be planned and operated over the short, medium and longer term. It would require the Secretary of State to prepare a written report and lay it before both Houses of Parliament.

In moving the new clause, I believe that one should tip one's hat again to our late colleague, Robert Adley. His belief in the way in which British Rail should operate in the future was always dependent upon a national plan for the railway services and a transport policy. Those are reflected in his Select Committee report.

Mr. Freeman: I certainly agree with the spirit of the new clause. I do not commend it to the House, but I can give clear assurances to my hon. Friend that the two key elements of the policy that he has just outlined will be followed. First, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will clarify his policy towards a national policy for the railway network, something which my right hon. Friend and I have sought to do on many occasions, particularly before the Select Committee that was chaired by the late Robert Adley. Secondly, I can give an assurance

[Mr. Freeman]

that there will be a written report. Perhaps the right vehicle would be the Department's annual report, which is available to the House. My right hon. Friend confirms that he will ensure that the annual report is written in such a clear fashion as to set out not only the achievements of his policy, but the activities and responsibilities of the regulator, the franchising director and, most important of all, the investment programme.

We accept unreservedly the spirit of the new clause. I hope therefore that my hon. Friend will not feel it necessary to press it. I look forward to the production of the first annual report covering the period following Royal Assent and the introduction of our reforms.

Dr. Marek: If the information is to be included in the annual report, let us have a little objectivity rather than a glossy Government public relations handout. If it were objective, with only a few statistics and with level-headed statements, I could go along with what the Minister has just said.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Without being presumptuous, I hope that, if Robert Adley is looking down on us, he will welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister said. I hope that he will smile at the way in which a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends in particular have debated with Ministers and that, like me, he will regard the outcome as advantageous to the country, as it is likely to help the railway's contribution to the country.

Mr. Rathbone: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the thought that he has put into the new clause in preparation for its being debated this evening. In light of what he had to say, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Further consideration adjourned.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

Company Taxation

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7021/92, relating to company taxation; endorses the principle of subsidiarity; believes that Commission proposals should allow for decentralisation of economic policy within member states; further believes that proposals should take full account of budgetary costs and the world context of Community action; and opposes measures which would distort the internal market and which bear upon company taxation.

Slaughter of Animals

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 9880/91 and 10306/92 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 15th February and 10th May 1993, relating to the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing; and supports the Government's intention to seek Community action to ensure high standards of welfare at slaughter which will be implemented and enforced throughout the Community.

Young Workers (Protection)

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 5378/92 and 4690/93 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Department of Employment on 10th May 1993, relating to the protection of young people at work; endorses the conclusions of the Madrid, Rome and Edinburgh European Councils that measures taken in the field of social affairs should have full regard to their effects on job creation, to the principle of subsidiarity, and to the diversity of national traditions and practices; and shares the Government's view that, while protection for children and young people at work is essential, existing legislation in the United Kingdom provides appropriate protection, that the need for Community legislation to protect children and young people has not been demonstrated and that the proposed Directive would be damaging to their employment opportunities and prospects. —*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Unfair Dismissal

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 1st April, be approved.

Legal Aid

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Scope) Regulations 1993, which were laid before this House on 22nd April, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Bypass (Aylesbury)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

1.6 am

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): We have waited several hours for the Adjournment debate, but as the Minister will know, my constituents in Aylesbury have waited far longer for their bypass. I welcome the opportunity to draw the Minister's attention and that of the House to the urgent need for better road communication to Aylesbury. I represent the county town of Buckinghamshire, a town designated as a growth area for housing and industry but whose growth is being stifled by inadequate road communication, which has been delayed for far too long.

In all my dealings with my hon. Friend the Minister, I have met with nothing but courtesy and good humour. I know that he will not take it amiss if I sometimes feel that it would take the pen of a Dickens to do justice to the way in which the Department of Transport has behaved with regard to the Aylesbury bypass. The spirit of the Circumlocution Office and its principle of "how not to do it" seems alive and well and is inspiring the Department's work.

The saga began as early as the 1960s, when the need for a bypass for Aylesbury was first recognised. In 1972, the Department of the Environment commissioned a highway feasibility study and concluded that a new trunk road was needed to link Oxford and the A1(M), passing south of Milton Keynes. Eight years later, in 1980, the Department of Transport decided to abandon its plan for a new trunk road in favour of improvements to existing roads and a network of bypasses around the major towns.

The Thame bypass, part of the series of links, was completed in 1980. In 1985, the Department of Transport's document "National Roads, England" called on the three county councils involved—Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire—to make bypass proposals to improve the A418-A505 route. In 1987, the Department of Transport announced in its White Paper that the Government intended to give the new route trunk road status. With that in mind, the Department provided a 100 per cent. grant for the Leighton Linslade bypass, which has now been completed, and proposes to make a 100 per cent. grant available for the proposed Wing bypass.

Buckinghamshire county council, as one would expect because it is an authority that is always active in the interests of its residents, did exactly what the Department of Transport asked. It formulated proposals to bypass Aylesbury. It drew up options for a bypass to the north or to the south of the town. It consulted the Aylesbury Vale district council. It published the alternatives in the local plan to allow full public consideration of the two options.

In 1989, the county council decided on the southern route as more practical and supported decisively by public opinion. Not only that, but the county council was ready to start building the first stage of the bypass linking the Wendover road, the A413, and the Stoke Mandeville road, the B443. The county council had planning permission for the first stage of the route. It had gone to the Secretary of State for Transport to ask whether he wanted to call in the application, and was told that he had no wish so to do.

In 1989, there was a further somersault by the Department of Transport. The White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" stated the Government's intention to develop an east-west corridor between the M40 and the east coast ports. The Department took over from the county council responsibility for the Aylesbury proposals which would form part of that route. Concern was expressed by the local authorities then about possible delays. The Department, as always, was reassuring.

Sadly, those reassurances were not borne out in practice. On 13 November 1990, Buckinghamshire's concern about the continuing delay was recorded in the minutes of the Department of Transport's eastern region consultative committee. The Department then said that public consultation on the preferred route would take place in July 1991. That target was not met.

On 23 January 1992, the consultative committee met again and the public papers of the committee show a target date for public consultation on the preferred option of spring 1992. That target was not met. On 8 December 1992, the consultative committee convened once more and the target date was announced as spring or early summer of 1993. That target was not met, and we are told that the target has slipped a further few months to perhaps the autumn of this year. It is little wonder that my constituents are becoming impatient of the Department's promises, which have been so often postponed.

I ask my hon. Friend to explain the reasons for the delay. We know that Oxfordshire county council and South Oxfordshire district council object to the southern route and prefer the northern route up to Bicester. The differences between the various local authorities have been known for a long time. They are surely the issues that should be debated at the public inquiry which is now long overdue. The need is now urgent.

Aylesbury is designated as a growth area, and the new proposals for the south-east—SERPLAN—mean still more growth for the town. The housing target set out both in the structure plan and in the local plan cannot be met unless the bypass is built. The bypass has strong support from local business, because every study shows that it is poor road communications more than any other single factor that is holding back the needed growth in Aylesbury's economy and the town's recovery from a severe and long-lasting recession.

What inspired me to apply for this debate was that Aylesbury is now in the ridiculous position whereby new planning applications for businesses to take up vacant lots on industrial estates are being recommended by the county council to the district council for refusal on the grounds that new business would bring in extra traffic and that that would be more than the already congested roads in Aylesbury could bear.

For example, in early 1993 more than 24,000 vehicles passed along Gate House road in Aylesbury, which adjoins major industrial estates, in 12 hours. That was down 1,500 vehicles on the 1990 peak, a peak which I am sure will be reached again as economic recovery in the south-east gathers strength. The single carriageway of that road is inadequate for the purposes that it is supposed to serve.

There is a strong economic and social case for the Department to press ahead as quickly as possible with the bypass that it has promised for so long. However, there is also a personal side to this question and that concerns the personal circumstances of my many constituents who live along the proposed route of the bypass.

[Mr. David Lidington]

Fortuitously, in the past week I have received a letter from a constituent who lives in Stoke Mandeville. I want to read one paragraph of that letter which summarises the feelings of people in my constituent's position. After describing the difficulties he faced in selling his house, because searches declared that the bypass was likely to pass within 200 yards of his home, my constituent wrote:

"I am not a 'NIMBY'. I simply ask that if the community wishes to mount a project for the general good then it should not be allowed in the process to damage my interests, life, career and marriage, all of which have been or are at threat because of this ineptitude. To prevaricate for over two years is neither equitable or responsible. To be dismissed with a mix of arrogance and indifference by Department of Transport officials; to be imprisoned without any end in sight to the sentence, is frankly intolerable in a fair and civilised society."

I believe that many other constituents who also live near the proposed routes would echo those sentiments.

In the interests of the town that I have the honour to represent and the many individuals whose lives have been blighted by the uncertainty over the future of the road, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to explain the reasons for the delays so far; and to tell us how long it will be before the Department goes out to consultation on the preferred route and how long it will be before the building of this much needed bypass gets under way.

1.17 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Kenneth Carlisle): It is my pleasure to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on securing tonight's debate. Throughout his time in the House, he has shown tremendous determination to bring to me, either here in the House or in the Department, his concerns about his local roads. I respect that very much. At this late hour, he has pursued the history of the Aylesbury bypass as fiercely as Sherlock Holmes would have pursued any rogue. I am sure that my hon. Friend will carry on determinedly in that vein until we have delivered the road.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech and his determination. I recognise that Aylesbury, like many other communities in the country, needs a bypass and that there are very strong economic and personal reasons for that community to have a bypass. We have a very big road building programme and many conflicting demands to meet.

In answering this debate, I feel that it is worth exploring some of the history of the scheme and the broader issues. If we do that, we will obtain a better appreciation of the situation. The current scheme has its origins in local authority proposals that, in the 1980s, formed part of a plan for a new route between Thame and Stevenage. Since 1983, proposals have been developed on a southern route following a joint planning study and public consultation by the county and district councils.

The Aylesbury district plan, adopted in 1991, confirmed the planning status of the proposals and consequently planning decisions in the area have assumed that a southern bypass would be built. That set the scene, in planning terms, for a route south of Aylesbury, and the scheme entered the trunk road programme in 1989.

That date is not too distant. Many schemes which entered the programme before then are only just coming to fruition now. So the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" announced the plans for a new strategic east-west route between the M40 and the east coast ports that would build on work already carried out by local authorities.

In view of its background knowledge of the scheme as a local authority scheme and to maintain momentum, Buckinghamshire county council was appointed as the design agent to continue the development of the Aylesbury proposals to meet the needs of the new trunk road.

Several strategic options have been examined as the bypass has developed. The study has proved complex and I know that at times it has led to local disappointment when the expected targets for consultation on the route of the bypass have been achieved. My hon. Friend gave strong expression to that disappointment in his speech.

For a start, the original strategy for a southern route has been developed in detail and reviewed. The investigation of strategies involving routes north of the town, and the implications that they could have for local planning issues and the economies of the scheme have also been studied. We have also had to consider the location of junctions and the justification for road links that might be provided to bring relief to Aylesbury from traffic using the A41 and A418 corridor through the town.

I recognise the importance of the scheme to the area. Progress has been made as quickly as possible, given the required detailed analysis of the options. However, I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that, with a scheme which represents such a large investment and has a significant impact on the environment and the economy of the area, there must be proper evaluation before taking the next steps to public consultation.

I should like to strengthen the arguments by saying that the scheme is complex. The decisions are certainly not easy. The road will cost a considerable sum of money. I advise my hon. Friend that it would be foolish to rush ahead with a scheme which we could not deliver or which would not stand up to public inquiry. Many schemes have been rushed forward but then delayed far beyond the date by which they should have been built because the preparation was short. Therefore, it is our right, in such an expensive and complex scheme, to take due care.

Also relevant to Aylesbury is the future development of the western section of the east-west route west of the town to the M40. It is no secret to my hon. Friend that the choice is between a northerly route along the A41 and a southerly one along the A418/A329. The choice could have a bearing on the solution for Aylesbury. My hon. Friend will also be aware of the pressures that the choice will put on other communities. He will recall the recent Adjournment debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) in which we considered Waddesdon on the A41 west of Aylesbury.

I have considered in the past few days our conclusions for the consultant study. I expect shortly to make an announcement about the way ahead. Once that is done, I should be able to authorise the way forward for the Aylesbury bypass proposals. Then we shall be able to fit that bypass into the wider theme of the east-west route. When we do that, it will remove speculation about the possible consequential effects on communities west of Aylesbury. It will enable us to proceed with greater certainty in both local and strategic terms.

As I said, it is important to get it right. The Department is sometimes criticised for not thinking strategically and not seeing a motorway scheme beyond the limits of the town by which it passes. It is important that the east-west

route—which embraces not only Aylesbury, but communities to the west and many others to the east—is considered properly.

I must defend my Department's performance against my hon. Friend's understandable criticisms. We truly want a rapid, effective scheme, but—as I have said—we need to get it right. We seek at all times to deal with hard-pressed members of communities as gently, and as correctly, as possible.

I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that, within the scope of our busy roads programme, we are eager to make progress for Aylesbury and many other communities throughout the country. I thank him for raising the subject, and hope that at least he and his constituents will be assured that progress with the bypass will proceed to the next stage in its development without delay. I hope that that stage will be reached fairly soon, not least because it is very important to relieve communities of blight and uncertainty.

I am certain that my hon. Friend will keep up his relentless pressure. He is determined to have the road, and I know that he will fight long for his community to secure it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 25 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

School Leavers (Schemes)

1. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people entered a scheme on leaving school in 1992; what was the equivalent figure in 1979; and if she will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The 270,000 young people starting youth training in 1992-93 all received training. Fewer than a quarter of the 162,000 starting on the youth opportunities programme in 1978-79 received training.

Mr. Banks: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will she assure me that she will continue to develop training policy to benefit the individual, rather than follow the advice of the Labour party, which is based on the social chapter and a national minimum wage but which would have a devastating consequence for our job prospects?

Mrs. Shephard: No doubt hon. Friend has noted that the number of unemployed young people in Britain is far below the EC average and that the opportunities that we offer under youth training, and in particular under youth credits, which we are extending into his constituency, give young people a very good start.

Mr. Grocott: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that, in the long history of silly, planted questions, that one must take the prize with additional awards? What matters to school leavers is not the number of training places, so many of which are of dubious value and do not lead to jobs, but the number of jobs and of proper apprenticeships. Will she confirm that they were much more abundant under the Labour Government of the 1970s than now? If she can cast her mind back further to the heady days of the Labour Government of the 1960s, will she confirm that the problem for school leavers was the abundant choice of jobs?

Mrs. Shephard: Young people and others certainly want jobs and want their training to lead to jobs, but it is extraordinary for the hon. Gentleman to assert that Conservative Members do not understand that point when Labour Members, with their support for a national minimum wage and for the provisions of the social chapter and their hostility to employers, never cease to show that they do not understand the point.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the fact that more than 300,000 young people are now on youth training schemes, and only just over 5,000 youngsters are waiting barely eight weeks to get on to a scheme.

Mrs. Shephard: In the past year, we experienced some problems with young people waiting longer than that. The Department therefore waged an intensive campaign to reduce that waiting time. Thanks to some full and frank discussions that I had with certain training and enterprise councils, we have now reached the figure that my hon. Friend gave, which is a great improvement on earlier figures. I will not rest until we have improved it still further.

Wages

2. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received about companies planning to lower wages when the wages council for their industry has been abolished.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Michael Forsyth): One person has written to me.

Mrs. Fyfe: Is the Minister aware that a considerable number of employers have already cut pay below wages council rates? A laundry worker in my constituency is paid £2·98p an hour and has been threatened with a reduction in his pay. Will the Minister advise the Prime Minister to advise foreign laundry firms to come to Britain and to take British laundry workers to the cleaners?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady's constituent wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and me some time ago about this matter. From memory, I think that he did so in December, when he was advised, if he had a complaint, to approach the wages inspectorate. He has not done so, but I should have thought that that was the proper avenue to pursue the matter.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the abolition of wages councils will create jobs—*[Interruption.]*—and is that not better than destroying jobs, which is what a national minimum wage will do?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Spanish socialists are presiding over twice the level of unemployment that we have because they embraced the minimum wage policy. I do not know what Labour Members are jeering about, because their party will not commit itself to bringing back wages councils after the House has abolished them. When pressed on the matter, it does not know, just as it does not know about a range of other issues—from British Rail, to Maastricht and one member, one vote. It is a party which is making a virtue out of agnosticism.

Mr. Galbraith: Why, in order to retain their jobs, must the low paid take cuts in wages, whereas, in order to retain their jobs, ex-con company directors must take huge salary increases, pension rights and share options?

Mr. Forsyth: We have never argued that the abolition of wages councils would necessarily result in a reduction in wage levels. When the Labour Government abolished 11 wages councils, wages did not go up. When the Conservative Government took people under the age of 21

out of the scope of wages councils, wages went up by two fifths and employment increased considerably among young people.

Labour Members must come to terms with the fact that the European Governments who have embraced their policies are presiding over higher levels of unemployment and fewer jobs in their economies as a result.

Off-the-job Training

3. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information she has on the extent of off-the-job training in the south-east.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: More than 700,000 employees in London and the south-east have received off-the-job training since last autumn.

Mr. Gerrard: Is it not the case that only three quarters of firms in the south-east are providing off-the-job training for their employees, and that in 1992 it averaged about two days per employee? Is that not a very poor record compared with that of many other European countries? Is it not also the case that the voluntary provision of training is failing, and that we need to require employers to provide appropriate training for their employees?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. One of the interesting things that have happened is that training has held up despite the difficulties facing firms as a result of the recession. We shall not take any lectures on the importance of training from a party that has consistently opposed employment training and youth training, no doubt at the behest of its trade union paymasters.

Mr. Evennett: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on his determination to increase the number of people taking job-related training? Will he confirm that, in the south-east in particular, manufacturing firms expect to increase their training budgets, or at least to keep them at the same level? Surely that is the way to proceed. Does he agree that we must have more training, and that manufacturing firms in the south-east are proving that they believe in training and are determined to invest in the future?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. He is right to emphasise the importance of raising the skill levels in the work force if we are to compete with countries from the Pacific rim, Japan and others, which are the key to prosperity. That is why it is so important that the private sector itself takes the initiative, why we are promoting Investors in People and why we reject the state-imposed regimes which Labour Members favour but which would add to industry's lack of competitiveness in Europe.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister mentioned the Investors in People programme. Has not it been a dismal failure, although it gives us no satisfaction to say it? Is it not the case that less than a third of the 10,000 whom it was hoped would sign up have done so? Is it not the truth that, despite what the Minister said, during the recession training decreased in the private sector? Have not the Government cut their training budget? Now that we know there is to be a round of public expenditure cuts, will the Minister stand at the Dispatch Box and tell us whether the Department of Employment will once again sacrifice its training budget and the nation's needs when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury does his work?

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Could we just for once hear an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman welcoming good news for Britain? The Investors In People programme covers 250,000 employees, and many organisations are committing themselves to it. Instead of running down Investors In People, why does not the hon. Gentleman join the Government and everyone else who wishes this country well, and encourage people to take advantage of that excellent scheme?

Job Placement Targets

4. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the target for job placements by the Employment Service during the most recent three months available; and what was the actual performance.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Employment Service placed 1·42 million unemployed people into work in 1992-93.

Mr. Clappison: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that the Employment Service has been especially successful in placing the long-term unemployed in work, and the fact that the restart interview scheme has played an important part in that assistance, and also in eliminating benefit fraud?

Mrs. Shephard: The record of the Employment Service at this difficult time has certainly been excellent. Not only has it met its target, but in some cases has exceeded it. The target for the coming year is for the service to place some 1·47 million unemployed people back in work, and I am confident that it will do so. Last year, the Employment Service also placed some one third of a million long-term unemployed people back into work, and that, too, was an excellent achievement.

It is a great shame that Opposition Members sneer at the achievements of the Employment Service and at the excellent staff in our jobcentres. If they, like me, spent more time in our jobcentres seeing what our excellent staff actually do, they might sneer a little less and cheer a little more.

Mr. McAllion: Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether any of those job placements included the recruitment of long-term unemployed people to cross picket lines at Timex in Dundee? Rather than setting the unemployed and the employed at one another's throats, surely the Government's time would be better spent in legislating to provide the same legal protection for workers taking industrial action in this country as is available for workers everywhere else in Europe?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman must know that employees who choose to go on strike have always risked dismissal. I hope that he will join my hon. Friends and myself in condemning the unacceptable violence demonstrated on the picket lines in Dundee.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the success that the Employment Service is delivering is such that virtually every, or even every, unemployed person has the opportunity to attend a restart interview? Is not the Employment Service getting record numbers back into work?

Mrs. Shephard: Certainly the Employment Service has never done a better job in reaching its targets. We also have more opportunities in training, in reskilling and in employment measures—1·6 million in all—than we have ever had to help unemployed people back into jobs.

Employer-provided Training

5. **Mr. Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received on employer-provided training in the north-west.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): None.

Mr. Hall: May I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that Normidtec training and enterprise council, which covers my constituency, recently held a special needs awareness week, to try to promote training opportunities for the disabled members of our community? Will he tell the House what steps the Government are taking to ensure that disabled members of the community have access to high-level training and to good jobs?

Mr. McLoughlin: I know about the scheme to which the hon. Gentleman refers. As I understand it, he, too, supports it, and I congratulate him on that. We are encouraging the TECs to identify what is needed locally, and we are giving vast assistance and support, through financial arrangements, to the TEC movement across the country.

Mr. Hawkins: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the fact that 250 organisations, including many household names employing more than 250,000 people, are already recognised as having achieved the standards specified in Investors In People, and the fact that about 3,000 organisations, including many more national and international companies, and many companies in the north-west, are working closely with their local training and enterprise councils on the programme?

Mr. McLoughlin: I can confirm those figures, and I am rather sorry that the Opposition seem to talk them down. Investors In People is important, and a number of household names have now signed up to committing themselves to the programme. As my hon. Friend says, more than 250 organisations have already achieved the target, and more than 3,000 have made a formal commitment to do so.

Youth Employment Initiatives

6. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what fresh initiatives she plans to take to increase employment opportunities for young people.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Youth credits are helping increasing numbers of school leavers to acquire the skills businesses need.

Mr. Michael: As one who worked with young people for many years before entering this place, may I ask the Minister whether he accepts that a job and the hope of a job are crucial not only to young people themselves, but to the health of the whole community? Does not the Minister understand that the Government's complacency, reflected in his complacent answer to the question, leads to communities paying a heavy price? Will he give an undertaking to review the Government's failure in this area and really to tackle the scandal of youth unemployment?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman asked me what new initiatives the Government had taken, and I told him that youth credits were an example of a successful scheme that the Government had introduced. There are no new ideas among Opposition Members, which is why I thought that the hon. Gentleman had asked this question.

I agree, of course, with everything that the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of a job for a young person. Again, I tell him that we shall not take lectures from the party that destroyed the apprenticeship system at the behest of the trade unions. It is the party of the closed shop and of the closed mind, which closed off opportunities for young people.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my hon. Friend accept that the continuing initiatives being taken through the training and enterprise councils and the fact that employers can have a major input into the TECs are a good way in which to create jobs? Will he pay tribute to the South and East Cheshire TEC which covers my constituency? It has introduced many initiatives and in Macclesfield and the surrounding area, we have among the lowest levels of unemployment among young people.

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, and I endorse everything that he says about his local training and enterprise council, which is one of those involved in pushing forward our training credit initiative, which was a manifesto commitment. It enables young people to choose the training that suits their needs, rather than forcing them to take what they are offered. I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend said. I am sure that his close co-operation with the TEC bodes well for youngsters in that part of Great Britain. What a pity that Opposition Members do not take the same constructive approach.

Ms Lynne: Given that unemployment among young disabled people leaving youth training is between 35 and 50 per cent., does the Minister agree that training for young disabled people is woefully inadequate? What initiatives do the Government intend to bring forward?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Lady that we need to do everything possible to help disabled people, young and old alike. The Government have taken a number of initiatives to help to improve the position. I agree with the hon. Lady that it is important to be conscious of that issue, especially when jobs have been thin on the ground as a result of recession. That is very much part of the policy and direction that we have given to TECs and which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State bears in mind when contracts are decided and the programme is determined for the subsequent year.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that what is crucial, indeed heartening, for the long-term employment prospects of young people is the huge increase in training that has come about over the past eight years? Will he confirm that, over those eight years, the proportion of people leaving school and going into education and training has risen to nearly 75 per cent. against 50 per cent. eight years ago?

The proportion of young people able to go to university is now no less than a third of young people, compared to

only a seventh under the previous Labour Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that both those trends underpin the skills base enormously, which will make the country competitive?

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The Government have done more than any other to create opportunities for youngsters in training, in schools and in further education. Although there are record numbers participating, we are by no means complacent. We want to build on that success, because we want to build a successful country; it is high time that Labour Members stopped simply carping and began helping us to achieve that.

Redundancies, Barnsley

7. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many redundancies have been declared in the Barnsley travel-to-work area from October 1992 to date.

Mr. McLoughlin: Figures for redundancies are not available below those at regional level.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister aware that, since 1990, unemployment in my constituency has increased by 44 per cent. and the level of vacancies has decreased by 60 per cent? Since October 1992, when we had the announcement of pit closures, we are likely to see 6,000 further redundancies in mining and related industries—the Houghton and Grimethorpe collieries closed in the past fortnight. It is not time that the Government started creating jobs, instead of throwing money at training and enterprise councils to train people for jobs that are not there? Could we not start by reversing some of the pit closure programme?

Mr. McLoughlin: I draw a number of points from the three questions asked by the hon. Gentleman. He used the base of 1990. If one uses the base of July 1986 for this constituency, unemployment was 6,217. In April 1993, unemployment was 4,329, which is a reduction of more than 30 per cent. I thought that even the hon. Gentleman would have recognised that. We will take no lectures from Labour Members about pit closures—*[Interruption.]* They may not like it, but they will hear it. Between 1964 and 1970, 277 coal mines closed.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister recognise that most of the people in Barnsley who have lost their jobs and been made redundant have benefited under the statutory redundancy scheme? Can he confirm that the Government are considering abolishing that scheme because they regard it as a burden on business?

Mr. McLoughlin: Here we go again—here is another scare story. We will have quite a few of them over the coming weeks. If the hon. Gentleman starts to believe everything that he reads, he will be confused when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes the statement that he intends to make.

Youth Unemployment

8. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the number of people aged 25 years and under who are unemployed.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: 814,742.

Mr. Jones: That is over 800,000, and 41,000 of them are in Wales. They are appalling figures. They represent the ruin of youthful hopes and great unhappiness in families. Will the right hon. Lady admit that it would be wrong for the Government to plan to strip many parts of the north of Wales of development area status, which represents the hope of more work, and give it to south coast towns? That would represent the complacency of her Department.

Mrs. Shephard: The assisted area map is a matter for some of my right hon. Friends and not necessarily for me. But I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would expect me to have input into the drawing up of that map, especially as far as the levels of unemployment are concerned.

In that regard, I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman, who takes a close interest in these matters, has not remarked on the fact that unemployment in Wales has fallen for the past three months, that it is below the national average, that the latest CBI trends survey shows that Wales is leading the country in terms of reported output and orders, and that that survey represents the best possible future for people in Wales, including young people.

Mr. Milligan: Has my right hon. Friend seen the extraordinary figures for youth unemployment in Hampshire, which show that youth unemployment has been steadily falling and is now at its lowest level for three years, which is remarkable in view of the recession? Does she agree that it reflects the good work not only of her Department but of the Hampshire TEC, the Hampshire education department and especially the schools in achieving a higher staying-on rate?

The Weston Park girls school, which I visited last week, has an intake from one of the most deprived parts of the constituency, yet it has increased its staying-on rate from 35 to 80 per cent.

Mrs. Shephard: It is possible that the words of my hon. Friend would have given some comfort to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) if he had been listening—which, of course, he was not. There is no question but that a well-trained, well-prepared cohort of young people, as we have in Hampshire, has the best possible chance of finding good jobs.

Ms Eagle: Does the Secretary of State realise that a figure of more than 800,000 youth unemployed is horrific to behold and that many of the young unemployed listening in Wallesey will not recognise the rosy picture that is being painted by the Conservative Government of the reality out there and their chances of getting work? What hope can she offer to the many people under the age of 25 whom I have met since I was elected a year ago who have never worked since they left school and see no prospect of work ahead of them?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Lady will know, because I have repeated it often in the House and elsewhere, that I have the utmost sympathy for anyone who faces unemployment. That, of course, includes young people. I hope that she is giving her support to the first-class work of the Employment Service and Merseyside TEC, which is doing sterling work with young people in her area, as well as the other TECs in the north-west. I also hope that she understands that if her party continues to espouse the extraordinary policies that it does, there will be no chance

and no hope whatever for young people or anyone else to look for better prospects in employment under a Labour Government.

Labour Statistics

9. **Mr. Kynoch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of people in Britain is currently in work, measured as a percentage of the population of working age; and what are the figures for other EC countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The British percentage in 1992 was 71 per cent. The figures for the other EC countries are in the form of a statistical table. With permission, I shall arrange for it to be printed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Kynoch: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we are probably No. 2 in the EC in that table and that that is positive news which should be welcomed—something which the Labour party is incapable of doing? Does she further agree that if the Labour party national policy on a minimum wage were implemented, it would be likely to cost up to 2 million jobs in Britain?

Mrs. Shephard: Britain has the second-highest participation rate in the EC, second only to Denmark. The rate in France, for example, is about 60 per cent. That is directly attributable to the national minimum wage. In Italy, the rate is about 52 per cent.

Mr. Skinner: Is it any wonder that other Common Market countries have marginally better figures of employment than Britain—[HON. MEMBERS: "They have not."]—when one takes into account the fact that the Government import German coal at £110 a tonne and shut British pits which could produce it at £40 a tonne? Is it any wonder that the people out there do not believe a word that the Government say? The only growth industry in Britain is fiddling dole figures and the cost of living figures. It is time that we got rid of them.

Mrs. Shephard: Given that the hon. Gentleman's premise was incorrect, he stands the risk of not being believed. But I am amazed that he has transparently sought yet again, by raising spurious points about the figures, like the rest of his party, to obscure the good news about unemployment coming down for the third month running. Not one Opposition Member has drawn attention to the fact that, for the third month running, we have seen unemployment come down.

Dame Jill Knight: I appreciate that it will be off the cuff, but can my right hon. Friend tell the House how much money the Government are spending in the current year on youth training and youth credits?

Mrs. Shephard: I think that I can manage that off the cuff—about £850 million.

Ms Quin: Will the Secretary of State deal with the fact that No. 1 in the table to which she referred was Denmark and, therefore, the figures cannot possibly have anything to do with levels of employment protection because Denmark has much better employment protection than Britain? Will she also reflect that at a time when the British Government are advertising in Swiss newspapers the low level of British employment protection, unemployment in Switzerland is only 4 per cent?

Mrs. Shephard: I can say to the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* I apologise for confusing the hon. Lady with the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), which is clearly a terrible insult. It is not normally the hon. Lady's practice to talk Britain down, but I am afraid that even she has now fallen prey to this disease which attacks the Labour party. Employers do not need to come here, and they certainly would not if she and her hon. Friends were in power. They come here because we have the lowest business taxation in the industrialised world, sensible labour laws, a flexible job market and a well-trained work force. Regulation does not create jobs.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that to keep a high percentage of people in work we need the most flexible possible job market—part time, full time, self-employed, shift workers and the lot? We should not be taking lessons from people who are not as adept at finding work for their citizens as we are.

Mrs. Shephard: We must maintain the upmost flexibility in our labour market. Indeed, the example that we are setting is being looked at with great interest by employers in both France and Germany.

Following is the information:

The latest comparable figures across all EC countries are for spring 1991 and are shown in the following table.

EC country	*Persons in employment (of working age[1])* *1000s*	*Population of working age[1]* *1000s*	*Percentage*
Denmark	2,601	3,382	76·9
United Kingdom	25,431	36,206	70·2
Germany	28,951	42,205	68·6
Portugal	4,542	6,672	68·1
Netherlands	6,363	10,070	63·2
Luxembourg	161	258	62·4
France	21,593	35,473	60·9
Belgium	3,703	6,455	57·4
Greece	3,471	6,444	53·9
Italy	20,044	38,205	52·5
Ireland	1,102	2,151	51·2
Spain	12,483	24,872	50·2

Source: Eurostat Labour Force Survey Results 1991.

[1]Working Age is taken to mean up to state pension age which varies between countries.

Training

10. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations she has received on the provision of training for 16 to 19-year-olds.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The representations I receive from employers and others note the considerable progress made in increasing young people's participation in education and training.

Mr. Jones: Does the Minister accept that we are in danger of failing a whole generation of young people if we do not have a well-planned and well-resourced training programme? Is not it the case that, even today, academic qualifications are valued more highly than vocational qualifications, at a time when the economy needs young people with excellent skills in industry, business, commerce

and science? As general national vocational qualifications in schools have failed, how do the Government intend to tackle this problem?

Mr. Forsyth: I was agreeing with the hon. Gentleman until he made his criticism of GNVQs. I agree with him about the importance of training. I also think that it is important that we get across what these national vocational qualifications are about. They are not well enough understood in the country and it is important that they should be, so that we may deal with the kind of prejudice against vocational training that the hon. Gentleman identifies. So little known are NVQs that they were referred to in *The Independent* the other day as envy queues—which we tend to associate with Opposition Members. That is why the Government have a major campaign to get across what NVQs are and the importance of vocational training.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) seemed to be asking my hon. Friend whether he would find some more resources and find some more money. This is often the case from the Opposition parties and it may, in certain circumstances, be justified. But if my hon. Friend is to do that—and even if he is not to do it—can he tell the House where he proposes to make savings in his Department so that we can help to deal with the Government deficit?

Mr. Forsyth: I am surprised at my hon. Friend. He must not fall into the trap of confusing inputs with outputs. My right hon. Friend has been able this year to increase the number of opportunities by nearly 600,000 to 1·6 million for unemployed people by looking at how the resources are used and ensuring that they are used effectively. It is outputs that matter, not inputs.

Mr. Leighton: Was not it the case that the unit price on a year's trading was predicated on the assumption that employers would be fighting each other for young people because of the demographic time bomb and therefore would be making an employers' contribution? He will know that this has not happened and that in many areas of the country there is an acute shortage of employer placements. They are not making their contribution and therefore the unit price in many cases is totally inadequate for quality training.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the difficulties of obtaining places, which in part has been a consequence of recession. However, I must give him the same advice as I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow): he must not confuse inputs with outputs. We have seen in the variation of costs of providing trading places around the country that some TECs have been able to do considerably more with given resources than have others. We need to ensure that the practice of the best becomes the practice of them all.

Voluntary Work

11. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures she is introducing to encourage voluntary work among the long-term unemployed in the west midlands.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget the introduction of 60,000 voluntary work opportunities through community action. Of these, 6,570 will be available in the west midlands.

Mr. Shepherd: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. May I remind him of the significant success of the old community programme, not least in Herefordshire, where a number of people gained employment in secure jobs as a consequence of participating in the scheme and many additional projects were completed? Does he agree that the revised community action, as announced in the Budget, will once again provide the opportunity for long-term unemployed people to become involved in voluntary work and for important projects to be carried out? However, it is important that people are aware that the scheme exists. What measures is my hon. Friend taking to make certain that its existence and benefits are fully understood by the public?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Community action provides a valuable service to the community by those who have been long-term unemployed. It is a scheme which will be administered by the Employment Service and the training enterprise councils, which will do a sufficient amount to ensure that the scheme becomes known.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Will the 6,000 people in the west midlands who are allowed to participate in the scheme continue to be registered as unemployed, or will they join the 77,000 people who have appeared on the sickness register in the past three months? Is not it a fact that the 221,000 unemployed people in the west midlands look to the Department to create jobs and training opportunities and not simply opportunities to participate in voluntary work?

Mr. McLoughlin: Again, we see the Opposition decrying any scheme to help unemployed people. Why do the Opposition always complain when unemployment rises and when it falls, too?

Mr. David Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that not only do we have 500,000 layabouts, but 1 million people who draw benefit are working on the black economy? Has he heard the first cuckoo this year? We cannot ask that lot opposite because they spend every year in cuckoo land.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I may have heard the first cuckoo the first month that unemployment fell and we have seen that happen on two subsequent months. That is widely welcomed by all Conservative Members and, as usual, widely condemned by the Opposition.

Training Credits

12. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have taken up training credits.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A total of 49,000 young people have taken up training credits and every 16 and 17-year-old will have the opportunity to do so in the course of this Parliament, in line with our manifesto commitment.

Mr. Graham: Does the Secretary of State remember when the House was told that every 16 and 17-year-old would be guaranteed a YTS place? Can the Secretary of State reassure the House that the 8,000 young Scots who cannot get a good training place will get one and restore some hope, some income and some future to the young people whom the Conservative party has totally abandoned?

Mr. Forsyth: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the fact that his constituency has been one of the first to benefit from training credits. If he thinks that nothing is being done in his constituency, I will gladly have the pilot carried out in my constituency instead of his. The hon. Gentleman has a real cheek coming to the House and quoting figures that he knows to be wrong when he and his constituency are benefiting from the Government's ideas.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that training credits will help young people gain the necessary training and experience for the real world? Their problems can be resolved only in that way and certainly not by loud shouting, which seems to be the only answer that the Opposition have.

Mr. Forsyth: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Training credits are a way of increasing choice for youngsters who are seeking training, help and support. The Government have been the party of choice and have continued to extend choice into every area. Choice should be available for the unemployed and it is a great pity that Opposition Members are not prepared to endorse a programme which will be of great benefit to youngsters the length and breadth of Britain.

Unemployment, Merseyside

13. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to reduce the level of unemployment on Merseyside; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The overall policy of the Department is to promote a free and flexible labour market that is designed to help to encourage employment in Merseyside, as in all other areas.

Mr. Parry: The Secretary of State will be visiting Liverpool next month. Will she take the opportunity of her visit to meet representatives of the building trade unions and construction employers to see what she can do to help get the industry back to work again, not only in Liverpool but throughout the United Kingdom? Such action is badly needed.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure that, if there is time in the Secretary of State's diary, she will consider such a meeting, although I understand that a packed day is already planned. The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that the Chancellor went a long way in his autumn statement last year to protect capital projects, an action which vastly helped the building industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the unveiling of a memorial statue to Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke by Her Majesty the Queen, as is, I understand, the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition.

Mr. Mandelson: Given that a system of charging for hospital beds would be a tax under which the longer one was ill the more one would have to pay, and given that it would destroy at a stroke the principle of a national health service free at the time of need and point of use, will the right hon. Gentleman give a categorical assurance today that the Government will never force NHS patients to pay charges for NHS beds?

Mr. Newton: I can best point the hon. Gentleman to what was said in our manifesto: that need, not ability to pay, is and will remain the basis on which care is offered to all in the NHS. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Ministers said in an interview in one of this morning's newspapers, we shall honour our pledges both in the spirit and the letter.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Patrick Nicholls.

Mr. Newton: While I am at it, may I just say— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I apologise. I had not appreciated that the Leader of the House had not completed his reply.

Mr. Newton: That is entirely understandable, Madam Speaker. I simply wanted to add that it was good to see the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) back from his triumph in masterminding the loss of Labour's deposit in Newbury.

Q2. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholls: Now that the Maastricht Bill has received its Third Reading, will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity, and indeed every opportunity, to tell the people of Britain that the Maastricht treaty is a move away from federalism, not a move towards it? It is the Liberal and Labour parties which are self-confessedly federalist and the Conservative party which is not. Is not this a treaty which gives us the opportunity to co-operate with other nation states, to the benefit of this country, which has always been the policy of the Conservative party?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. By enshrining subsidiarity and co-operation between states, the Maastricht treaty will move us to a much less centralised Europe. That is a major achievement and a great gain from the British point of view. As for the Labour party, it has, to my recollection, had seven

different policies on Europe in the time that I have been in the House and the Opposition appeared to be changing their minds again even last week.

Mrs. Beckett: The Lord President quoted the Prime Minister on the manifesto pledges of the Conservative party. Does he recall the pledge not to increase national insurance contributions—broken? Does he recall the pledge to maintain mortgage interest relief—broken? How does he square all that with what the Prime Minister said yesterday?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend made the position absolutely clear in his answer last week, in setting out the Government's intentions to review public expenditure against the background of the pledges that we have made and the need to protect the most vulnerable. If the right hon. Lady disagrees with that, perhaps she would care to tell us whether she is disowning, in his absence, her right hon. and learned Friend's statement that we should be prepared to re-examine everything and that he has not ruled anything out.

Mrs. Beckett: The Leader of the House and his party kept talking about taking tough decisions. When will the Government take the tough decision to admit even the smallest share of the blame for the state to which this country has been reduced—never mind the price the Government are asking the British people to pay?

Mr. Newton: When it comes to talking about the price that the British people must pay, the hon. Lady must count as some kind of expert. I have been looking back at something said by her hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) some time ago:

"I will not take lessons in Left wing unity from Margaret Beckett. She was the person who went into the 1976 Labour government to implement the cuts over which I had resigned."

[Interruption.]

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must resume their seats.

Mrs. Beckett: The Lord President knows full well that the Government went into the general election campaign promising tax cuts and public expenditure increases. Is not the most fundamental problem that Britain faces today the fact that it has a Government whose dishonesty is exceeded only by their incompetence?

Mr. Newton: What I know is that the Government are approaching their difficult task in a responsible and considered way and that they are not going to get into the position that led the right hon. Lady into the problem that I have just quoted—the IMF coming here telling the Government what to do.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government's priorities in the European Community will, in the foreseeable future, be to secure the entry to the Community of our former partners in the European Free Trade Association, notably the Scandinavian countries and Austria, and to facilitate the arrangements that the Community makes with the countries of eastern and central Europe?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We have a number of important tasks in the Community, including carrying forward the concept of subsidiarity. Among the most important tasks and among those on which we have made the most gains in recent months is that of enlargement, to embrace exactly the countries to which my hon. Friend refers.

Mr. Ashdown: Can the right hon. Gentleman categorically assure the House that no Government agency was involved in any way in coaching witnesses from Walter Somers before they appeared before the Select Committee looking into the Iraqi gun affair?

Mr. Newton: The right hon. Gentleman well knows that all these matters are the subject of an inquiry by Lord Justice Scott. The most appropriate course for Ministers and other hon. Members is to allow that inquiry to conduct its proceedings properly.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Does my right hon. Friend agree that last week's Audit Commission report on the chronic mismanagement, waste and incompetence of Lambeth council painted a grim picture of Labour in control of councils? Does he further agree that it is a bit rich when the deputy Leader of the Opposition talks about the Government displaying incompetence and dishonesty when Labour has a record like that?

Mr. Newton: I was indeed pretty horrified to hear details of that Audit Commission report on Lambeth council, although not entirely surprised in view of its socialist record of incompetence and waste, which is well known on both sides of the House. It reminded me, once again, of that immortal quote from *Tribune* last May:

"Ineffectual or rotten Labour councils . . . have been a feature of political life for as long as anyone can remember."

Q3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice :** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Prentice: Is the Lord President aware that the first passenger train that ran in England between Liverpool and Manchester achieved a top speed of 29 mph? That was in 1829. Is not it disgraceful that 164 years ago a train could achieve a higher speed than the train currently running between Nelson and Colne in my constituency? Is the Lord President further aware that I have a letter from the chairman of British Rail which says that the 20 mph speed restriction will be permanent because of cuts in Government funding?

Mr. Newton: Somewhat to my surprise—I had not anticipated that the hon. Gentleman would seek to be so helpful—that seems to be the best argument I have heard for some time for the rapid passage of the Railways Bill, which is before the House today.

Q4. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that subsidiarity can be applied retrospectively as well as prospectively, and that that means that any European legislation which has been laid before the House and which we have had to rubber stamp since 1986 can—if it meets the subsidiarity test—be either amended or swept aside?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend is right. The Commission is reviewing existing European Community law. At the Edinburgh Council it presented some 32 examples of legislation which should be either withdrawn, amended or re-examined, or further proposals that should not be pursued. That review is continuing and a full report is scheduled for the European Council in December this year. It is our intention that those items to which subisidiarity applies should be amended or repealed.

Mr. Sheldon: In regard to the Government's intention to reduce the budget deficit, we have heard from Minister after Minister that nothing is ruled out, yet we have heard nothing about increasing the higher rate of tax. Should not that be ruled in?

Mr. Newton: It is not only from Ministers that we have heard that. As I reminded the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), that is what the Leader of the Opposition is saying, too. That is the sensible way in which to approach these matters and that is the way in which the Government are approaching them.

Overseas Aid

Q5. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the relative importance of trade and aid in assisting the economic development of the poorest nations.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

Worldwide trade liberalisation and measures to encourage the private sector are critical for developing countries, but many countries, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable, will continue to need concessional finance for the foreseeable future. Further debt reduction along the lines of the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made in Trinidad in 1990 will also be required for the poorest, most heavily indebted countries.

Mr. Luff: I thank my right hon. Friend warmly for what he has just said. Does he agree that the major objective of our aid policy should be to encourage the promotion of private sector enterprises in the developing world? In that context, will he pay tribute to the work of the Commonwealth Development Corporation? Does he further agree that we have a fine record as a Government for fighting for free trade, which brings advantages to the developed and the developing world? Can he give an assurance that that fine record will be enhanced at the G7 summit in Tokyo in July this year?

Mr. Newton: Certainly I acknowledge, as I think the whole House would, the leading role that my right hon. Friend and other colleagues have played in advancing the cause of free trade and the successful outcome to the GATT round. My hon. Friend is also right about the part played by the Commonwealth Development Corporation which is the main instrument in our aid programme for the direct promotion of private investment in developing countries. As it happens, United Kingdom direct private investment in developing countries was estimated to be some £3 billion in 1991. That is half the overall total for the whole European Community. It is a record of which we can be proud.

Mr. Worthington: If the Minister is in favour of free trade, when will we abandon the practice of demanding that developing countries drop their import tariffs and when will we stop dumping subsidised CAP food on them?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have always taken the view that trade is as important as aid in advancing the circumstances of developing countries. I think he will agree that we have a better record than many in promoting those objectives.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I ask whether the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in view of the fact that he has made a statement to the press rebutting Sir Hal Miller's evidence to the Scott inquiry, has given any indication that he would wish to make a statement to the House?

Madam Speaker: No. I have not received any indication from any Minister about seeking to make a statement to the House.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. It may be of interest to the House to know that I have been invited to take the opportunity to give oral evidence to Lord Justice Scott's inquiry on Thursday—I believe, on Thursday morning—and I shall gladly avail myself of that opportunity.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Flattered though I am that the Leader of the House should mention me in dispatches, and that he should remember an incident of 17 years ago when in seven years' time no one will remember him at all, is it in order for the Minister to make reference to another hon. Member without giving notice that he intends to do so? With your indulgence, Madam Speaker, may I reflect that if a few more hon. Gentlemen on the Conservative side resigned because of policies on which they have reneged, the country politically would be much better off?

Madam Speaker: I am sure the hon. Lady is aware that during Question Time it is not necessary to give notice, although it is necessary during a debate. It is a courtesy if the reference is planned.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder if you could help me. Tomorrow Tory-controlled Calderdale intends to support a decision to tag electronically elderly people in elderly persons' homes in Halifax, as the homes are short-staffed and cannot supervise residents properly because of their under-funded budget. It is an unethical and undignified proposal. Has the Secretary of State for Health indicated that she intends to make a statement on Government policy on electronically tagging elderly people and NHS patients because of shortage of staff? In the past that procedure has been reserved for prisoners and people on parole.

Madam Speaker: I have had no indication that the right hon. Lady intends to make any such statement. The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) will have to seek some other method of raising the matter, in which she is obviously interested.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Further to the point of order raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), Madam Speaker. While it is welcome that the former Attorney-General is to give evidence to the Scott inquiry, it will not have escaped your notice that that coincides with the start of the Whitsun recess. The question is, when will we have answers about the matter in the House?

Madam Speaker: It is for the Government to determine the order of business and not for the Speaker, as the right hon. Gentleman is aware.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), Madam Speaker. You are quite right to say that, during exchanges, matters arise spontaneously, and hon. Members cannot normally be warned when their names are to be mentioned. However, it was clear during today's exchanges with the Leader of the House—as is common in the case of the Prime Minister—that the right hon. Gentleman did not say anything remotely spontaneous. It was all carefully rehearsed and read out. Given that there was no element of spontaneity, should not the rule that applies to normal debate—that Members ought to be warned when they are to be referred to in a premeditated way—have been applied in this case?

Madam Speaker: I dealt with that matter in my original ruling. It is necessary to give notice when a Member is to be mentioned in the course of a debate. However, as hon. Members know, that is not usually possible at Question Time.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday I raised with your office and with yourself matters relating to Sir Hal Miller's evidence to the Scott inquiry, which seemed to me to be matters for the House.

Madam Speaker: Order. As I have quite a few things to do, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give me a little time. I have drafted a letter to him. If he gives me a moment, I shall leave the Chair and sign it. I trust that that satisfies him.

Full Employment (Commission)

3.35 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a permanent Commission to assist and advise Parliament on matters relating to the achievement of full employment in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and related matters.

I should like to begin by contrasting the attitude and objectives of the current Prime Minister with those of his predecessor. During the old regime, not only was full employment taken off the agenda for political debate, but the frontier was policed by withering scorn being poured upon people who wished to raise the topic. They were told that they were being cruel to people in the dole queues even to refer to the possibility of full employment. That attitude could not contrast more starkly with the attitude of the current Prime Minister, who has made it clear to the House that he regards full employment as one of the Government's major objectives. This Bill seeks to introduce a means of allowing him to achieve that objective.

Given the horror that unemployment visits on so many of our constituents, I wish to ask why so little of the time of the House of Commons should be spent on this issue. It is a key issue not only to the constituents of Opposition Members but also to those of many Conservative right hon. and hon. Members. Part of the answer must be that thinking about full employment is now such an enormous task that it is easier not to do so.

During the first world war Barbara Wootton noticed that when the telegram arrived to inform her mother that her—Barbara's mother's—son had died, her mother worked herself up into a great state because the telegram got the designation of his office wrong. Each time War Office correspondence arrived, Barbara's mother was similarly upset about the mistake in rank.

When, after six weeks of marriage, Barbara received a telegram saying that her husband had died, she was similarly worked up into a rage because the corner of her telegram was torn. From this experience, Barbara drew the conclusion that when human beings face problems too large for them to cope with, they tend to concentrate on minor matters rather than on the major subject at hand.

Many of our constituents will ask why, having spent so many hours, weeks and months on the Maastricht Bill, we cannot spend time debating ways back to full employment. While I welcome without reservation the figures of the past three months, which denote a fall in the number of registered unemployed, as well as an increase in manufacturing output and an increase in the number of people employed in manufacturing, I have to ask whether this trend, by itself, can take the country back to full employment. I know the answer to that question, as does every right hon. and hon. Member and those of our constituents who are unemployed, for there are identifiable long-term trends in the British economy working against full employment.

From the mid-1960s, with each boom, the number unemployed was higher than at the previous boom. Also, we not only have today a record public sector borrowing requirement, but one that interacts with a record trade deficit. There is an urgent need to reduce the PSBR, but the danger of achieving that by reflating is so to increase the trade deficit that there is a run on our currency. The third force that will prevent the natural establishment of full employment is that the Maastricht treaty contains convergence terms that, if met, will ensure that our economy is further deflated.

The Bill's aim is to focus attention and political debate on the importance now of achieving full employment. It modestly defines that goal as 3 per cent. unemployment. It acknowledges that, if that goal is to be achieved, thoughts have to be thought that have yet to be thought of, let alone implemented. It would establish a machinery to allow the House and the country to do that.

The Bill's primary aim is to establish a full employment commission that would regularly report to Parliament on trends in this country and world wide that affect this country's chances of moving back to full employment. Also, how do we evaluate the transfer of school to work, and how does that compare with the most effective of our competitors? What can we learn from elsewhere so that best practice in achieving full employment can be implemented? Again, the commission would have a duty to evaluate Government policy.

Why that action? Why the Bill? We know that unemployment is not a warm overcoat that our constituents willingly put on and shuffle around in; it is the greatest evil facing them. That is something to which we must turn our minds if we are to tackle it effectively.

If we cannot be concerned about those of our constituents who are unemployed, I pose another question. Today's newspapers, rightly, pay some attention to the number of children growing up in lone parent households. Many of our constituents, in an attempt not to be driven mad by the thought of not being able to find work, have written off from their daily lives the prospect of ever finding work.

A whole generation of children are now growing up in households in which full-time work has been written out of their lives. If we are concerned about the effect on children whose two parents do not live together, should we not be equally concerned about the devastating effect on children growing up in a household in which no adult member regularly earns enough to look after all or part of the family?

In seeking approval to introduce the Bill, I draw attention to a change of opinion about the need to move towards ways of achieving full employment. Earlier I referred to Barbara Wootton's observations during the first world war. I refer now to the second world war poster that showed a young son or grandson sitting on the knee of his father or grandfather, asking that person what he did when the country was at war. Today, this country is trying to register a need to put full employment back at the top of the political agenda. We will be asked how we reacted to that change in the political debate. I hope that the House will answer not only by passing the motion without opposition but will seek ways of effectively ensuring that the Bill reaches the statute book.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Frank Field, Ms Angela Eagle, Mrs. Jane Kennedy, Mr. Malcolm Wicks, Mr. Calum Macdonald and Mr. Charles Kennedy.

Full Employment (Commission)

Mr. Frank Field accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a permanent Commission to assist and advise Parliament on matters relating to the achievement of full employment in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

and related matters: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 July, and to be printed. [Bill 200.]

Orders of the Day

Railways Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

[Relevant documents: The First Report from the Transport Committee, The Future of the Railways in the light of the Government's White Paper Proposals: Interim Report: HC (1992-93) 375, and the Second Report from the Transport Committee, The Future of the Railways in the Light of the Government's White Paper Proposals, HC (1992-93) 246, together with Government Observations thereon (Second Special Report, HC (1992-93) 685).]

New clause 12

CONCESSIONARY FARES: RAIL CARDS

'(1) Each franchise agreement shall include such provision as the Franchising Director considers appropriate for the purpose of securing that the franchised services are available at concessionary rates to passengers holding a document obtained from the Board (or such other person as may be specified in the franchise agreement) as a person who—

(a) has attained the age of 60;

(b) has not attained the age of 26 or is undergoing full-time education or training;

(c) is handicapped or disabled; or

(d) is of such other description as may be specified in the franchise agreement.

(2) In subsection (1) above "handicapped" and "disabled" have the same meanings as in Group 14 of Schedule 5 to the Value Added Tax Act 1983.

(3) A franchise agreement shall also include such provision as the Franchising Director considers appropriate for the purpose of enabling persons who wish to be able to travel within the locality where the franchised services are provided using railway and other passenger transport services—

(a) to travel by the franchised services and other such services on the purchase of a single document; or

(b) to travel on all those services at a concessionary fare by means of the purchase of a single document entitling them to a concession on designated services.'.

—*[Sir Keith Speed.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.45 pm

Sir Keith Speed (Ashford): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I start be declaring an interest as, for a number of years, I have, through my company, been a consultant to InterCity.

I add my tribute to our late friend and colleague, Robert Adley, On the morning of 22 April, a couple of days before his fatal illness, we spent several hours in his room in the House thinking about the Bill in the light of the report of the Select Committee and the Bill's Committee stage. If there is any credit to be given for the proposals that I am making, he is entitled to 100 per cent. of it.

The new clause seeks to enshrine in legislation the railcards and discount cards that are available to various groups of our fellow citizens. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the rest of the Bill, there is no question but that this part of it has caused considerable concern. I have received letters from organisations such as Saga Holidays, Age Concern, women's institutes and others who fear that

our senior citizens will lose the opportunities offered by their senior citizens railcards, which enable them to travel at reasonable fares all over the country.

Others could express similar concerns: disabled people in particular, young people and those who use the intermodal railcard in London and many other metropolitan cities, which conveniently allows people to travel by rail, bus or tube.

I have had fruitful and positive discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for which I pay tribute to him. He has made it clear from the outset that our aims are identical: we want to ensure that such cards are preserved. The Bill does not propose that. It is argued that, because such cards are so lucrative, the franchise companies would be stupid to withdraw them. The commercial argument is that those facilities are mainly available at off-peak times and that it is better to get passengers on seats, even if their fare is discounted, because it helps the cash flow and profitability of the railway company or line.

The social advantages, which I have mentioned briefly, are substantial. Britain has much to learn about leisure travel for senior citizens. SNCF in France identified the old-age pension market and has done much to encourage travel around France at discounted rates, to the benefit of its finances. British Rail, in recent years, offered away-days at £1, and the senior citizens' railcard, which entitles pensioners to substantial discounts, and other discount cards are cherished by many hundreds of thousands of older people, disabled people and young people.

Mr. Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): Before my hon. Friend leaves the issue of the needs of pensioners and pensioners railcards, may I ask whether he is aware that less than 10 per cent. of single pensioners who depend mainly on the state pension have a car? If they were deprived of their railcards, that would make it extraordinarily difficult for many of them to visit relations or to travel on trains at all.

Sir Keith Speed: My hon. Friend is right. In a few years' time, I shall be a state retirement pensioner. It is very important for us to consider pensioners' quality of life. Travel enables people to visit their grandchildren or children and visit other parts of the country when they have the available time and leisure and can do so at a reasonable price. A rail journey in itself can be a pleasurable activity for many older or disabled people. My colleagues and I therefore believe that it is vital that the safeguard is incorporated in the Bill so that, beyond peradventure, there is no question of people losing their concessions.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister have argued that they will issue directives or instructions to the effect that the cards should remain, but that is not the same as the House expressing a view. If the safeguard is incorporated in legislation, it will mean that, if anyone seeks to withdraw the cards or any concessions, the matter will have to be brought back to the House so that the legislation can be amended; we or future Members of Parliament will then have to vote and be answerable to the electorate.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier —I appreciate the point he makes—that it would be extremely unlikely that any of the franchise operators would withdraw the cards because there would be an outcry if they did. However, if, for example, the franchisee running trains on the line from Exeter to Paddington decided to withdraw the card—perhaps for cash-flow reasons or merely because of hard-nosed management—half a dozen colleagues representing constituencies up and down the line would cause a fuss, furore and storm. However, if British Rail decided overnight to abolish senior citizens railcards, 650 hon. Members would write to my right hon. Friend—not 651, because my right hon. Friend would not write to himself as he would know what the problems were. Therefore, it is vital to enshrine the safeguard in legislation, and this is perhaps the only opportunity that we shall have for a very long time.

If my right hon. Friend accepts the new clause, not only would it be good to have enshrined the proposal in legislation for the future but the Bill would provide something that does not exist at present. Elderly, disabled or young people or even intermodal card users currently have no statutory right to this concession. People will value such a right in the future, and I hope that more young people and old-age pensioners will use the cards and enjoy them even more.

I trust that the debate will be brief—because my case is so strong, I hope that my right hon. Friend will accept it. The new clause would give fresh opportunities to young, old and disabled people and would ensure that people travelling into towns and cities across the country can use the intermodal cards which are so effective and useful. I commend the new clause to the House.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. **John MacGregor**): As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) said, we entirely agree on the objective. That was clear from our discussions. I fully understand the importance of railcards to senior citizens and other groups. Indeed, my hon. Friend has explained their importance so well that I do not need to repeat what he said. I can only add that many thousands of my constituents benefit from the senior citizens railcard, as do members of my family. I do not think that is a declaration of interest but, if it has to be, then it is. I know of people who are very clear about the benefits of railcards, and I have seen those benefits many times. In due course, I shall join my hon. Friend in becoming a senior citizen, so I have absolutely no wish to see cards disappear, as I have made clear throughout the proceedings on the Bill. Indeed, I believe that under our proposals their scope and scale will be enhanced.

The question is how we can best achieve our objectives. My hon. Friend was right to say that British Rail has no statutory obligations at present, nor has it ever had. There is a feeling among many people that British Rail has a statutory obligation, but it does not. I recognise the social benefits of many of the cards, especially the senior citizens card, but they are also—indeed, in some ways, primarily —marketing incentives, to attract more passengers on to the railway during off-peak periods. That means, as it was somewhat inelegantly put during our discussions, "more bums on seats."

That is obviously a clear incentive for British Rail, and I believe that it would be an even greater incentive for franchisees. The basis of our case has been that franchisees will make their returns and, if they are successful, benefit both themselves and their employees more, in two ways: first, by seeking effective cost savings and by running a cost-effective franchise; and, secondly, by increasing

[Mr. John MacGregor]

revenue. Increased revenue will be achieved by attracting more passengers. So the franchisees will have an even greater incentive than British Rail has ever had to seek to exploit in every possible way, through more extensive and imaginative discount schemes, the possibility of filling up the trains, and that is why——

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: May I finish my sentence first?

That is why I believe profoundly that under our reforms there will be more use of such schemes.

Mr. Martin: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is profitable for British Rail to offer senior citizens and young persons railcards, but that the disabled persons initiative, which under his plan will be enshrined in the legislation, is not profitable?

Mr. MacGregor: That is correct, although it is not enshrined in legislation—I shall deal with that later. It is correct to say that in so far as cards attract more paisengers there is an obvious revenue benefit. That is why I believe that there is no doubt that franchisees will wish to continue, extend and expand the schemes.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Secretary of State is completely ignoring the reality that there is a doubt. He says that there is no doubt in his mind that the franchisees will want to use those facilities, but surely the problem is that, with the break-up of a national rail network and the break-up of InterCity, there is a real doubt. If the Secretary of State is so convinced, why does he oppose legislating to assuage the doubt and to give pensioners and future pensioners confidence that there is no possibility of the cards being withdrawn?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my case; I shall come to that question at the logical point in my argument.

There is a reason why the British Rail schemes have not been statutory, and that is the danger of inflexibility. As the House will know, British Rail changes the range and types of schemes over time, and wishes to develop them, as I believe that the franchisees will. There is an obvious risk that, if the conditions of any scheme—the people to whom it should apply, and so on—are made statutory, as British Rail or the franchisees wish to develop their schemes they will have to seek primary legislation every time the original conditions are found to be constricting.

There have been good commercial, marketing and—as one of my hon. Friends remarked from a sedentary position—"businesslike" reasons for wishing to operate more and more schemes. That is why we have said that we have every reason to believe that railcards will expand and prosper under the new reforms, on a non-statutory basis, as now, with co-ordination between operators being achieved by joint industry arrangements.

There has been some outside comment on that point, so I must explain that there is no technical difficulty in such arrangements. British Rail currently operates under 19 profit centres, on which, as I made clear yesterday, the franchise units that we expect will be based. The profit centres now within British Rail have to have a clearing house to arrange for the allocation of the relevant parts of the revenue to each centre, so there will be no technical difficulty about such arrangements under our reforms.

I now come to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin). We had accepted that the disabled persons railcard was different. It is provided voluntarily by British Rail and it does not make a profit; so there is not so much a marketing advantage or a marketing scheme here as a social benefit. Moreover, it is available for use in peak hours as well as in off-peak hours and is offered in recognition of the special needs of disabled people. We have, therefore, said that the franchising director will require franchisees to provide common discounts for disabled people on broadly similar lines to the present arrangements. We saw no need for that provision to be in the Bill because we had given an undertaking that we would direct the franchising director in his objectives to require such a provision.

4 pm

In our discussions, my hon. Friends took the force of the point that under our reforms there is a greater incentive for operators to seek to use railcard and discount schemes and that there is a need to retain flexibility. My hon. Friends made two points in response. The first point—which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford especially pressed and which he has also raised this afternoon—is that, under the voluntary arrangements, we could not guarantee that there would be a national network. One could not absolutely guarantee that there would be no gaps. My hon. Friend has made the point that there may be one or two franchisees who do not share my view and who may not—this is hypothetical—operate a scheme. In that particular franchise, there would be a gap not only for those who travel there but for those who travel through that franchise.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford also made the point that he would prefer the provision to be in the Bill to ensure the continuance of these schemes. I made it clear that one possibility was to require, through directions to the franchising director, that he should do the same in the contracts with franchises for senior citizen railcards, for example, as we have instructed him to do for the disabled. My hon. Friend replied that he had no doubt that I would wish to do that for the entire period that I was Secretary of State for Transport. I can assure him that that is the case. However, he pointed out, and I agree, that these reforms will last for a long time; they may last longer than I will be Secretary of State—one cannot be absolutely sure of any future Secretary of State.

My hon. Friends fully accepted the need to maintain flexibility and saw a positive advantage in that. In return, I accept the force of their two points. I take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford has said and therefore propose to move as follows. I take on board the points, as we have throughout the course of the Bill. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport listened carefully to all the arguments, and where we believe that the case has been made, provided that they are in line with or further our objectives, we are prepared to make changes. The size of the amendment paper reflects that position and that attitude in Committee.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford that I fear that new clause 12 is defective for a number of reasons, through which I have briefly taken him. However, I accept the force of my hon. Friend's arguments.

Therefore, I now give an undertaking to bring forward in another place an amendment to impose a duty on the franchising director to require, through franchise agreements, participation in discount schemes for senior citizens, disabled people and young people. I thank my hon. Friend for the courteous and constructive way in which we have carried out our discussions. He has convinced me that we just needed to go that little bit further to ensure the continuance of such schemes and I gladly confirm that we will do so.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): My modest experience has taught me one thing. Tory rebellions are a bit like tooth fairies—"Believe in them when you see them". There is little in the statement by the Secretary of State that should dissuade the Tory Members who tabled the new clause from pursuing it to the vote. I shall explain why. First, let us be clear that we are seeking not to create new rights or benefits, but to defend existing ones which are threatened—an unnecessary by-product of this unwanted Bill. The only people responsible for putting them at risk are the Secretary of State and his colleagues.

We are seeking to safeguard benefits that are appreciated and enjoyed by millions of our constituents, especially the young and the old. The outcome of the debate does not matter, because the Government have distinguised themselves by creating confusion and uncertainty about a feature of daily life that is valued by so many people. Why have they created that uncertainty? It is not an end in itself but a facilitator for the ideological aim of fragmenting and privatising railway services. It is another example of the fact that mean-mindedness is the essential handmaiden of right-wing dogma.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilson: I shall give way in a moment. I want to deal with the people who will be affected by this and explain to Conservative Members why the Secretary of State's offer is inadequate.

In a sense, I am trying to be helpful. I am dealing with the short-term aim of trying to build genuine safeguards into the legislation. Conservative Members will be affected by the long-term consequences of what is being done, but that is not my responsibility or concern.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: I shall give way in a moment. Let us consider the number of people involved in the various schemes, including those schemes to which the Secretary of State made no reference this afternoon. There are 700,000 holders of the senior railcard, 700,000 holders of the young person's railcard and 250,000 holders—the Secretary of State did not mention this—of the family railcard.

Mr. MacGregor: There is a distinction. The family railcard—obviously this can be discussed—is a clear example of a marketing initiative without the same social connotations as the senior citizens railcard or the young persons railcard. The marketing initiative is frequently changed to meet new marketing conditions. Therefore, there is a distinction.

Mr. Wilson: The family railcard is a social device to get people who cannot necessarily afford to travel otherwise out of the cities and into the country during off-peak periods. It may have an economic benefit for the railways, but it also has a social benefit. It falls into exactly the same category because, if it were taken away, it would not be a significant financial loss to the railways, but it would be a massive social loss to those who enjoy its benefits. The Secretary of State will be on his feet a few more times if he responds to each of my points.

Mr. Cormack *rose*——

Mr. Wilson: I shall give way in due course.

There are 740,000 holders of the London travelcard. Specifically on the railways—because the travelcard also covers other forms of transport—there are 300,000 holders of the network card and an additional 300,000 holders who benefit. That is 600,000 people with a network card. There are 55,000 holders of the gold partners card. In total, 2·33 million people benefit from the existing railcard system. All of those people have security in the knowledge that such benefits exist, and will continue to exist, throughout the network. In the legislation, the Government are removing that certainty and replacing it with the lottery that the Secretary of State has been dealing with today.

Mr. Cormack: The hon. Gentleman is making the speech that perhaps he should have made if my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had been intransigent. He is paying no regard whatever to the fact that there is no statutory safeguard at present—he is simply spreading unease and anxiety among people throughout the country when he should know better.

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman may think that he is off the hook with those remarks, but he is not. Frankly, the question whether he accepts what has been said or listens to the facts is a matter between him and his conscience, and his constituents. One of the facts is that many hundreds of thousands of people who hold railcards at present were not covered by the Secretary of State's announcement. We will refer to other deficiencies in the statement later.

I see that the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) is trying to get to his feet. He was a member of the Standing Committee that considered the Bill. He voted for every dot and comma of it and against every effort by Labour Members to build in safeguards. The idea that he has turned up now to express concern is not a runner.

Mr. Raymond Robertson (Aberdeen, South): Will the hon. Gentleman take the time to tell the House what guarantees present railcard holders have that British Rail will not withdraw them tomorrow?

Mr. Wilson: That is an idiotic question. They have the same guarantees as they had yesterday that British Rail would not guarantee them today. But a secure system is in place, based on the social as well as the economic remit of British Rail. It introduced railcards and it has not withdrawn them for years. Why? That is precisely the point that I am coming to.

The fallacy on which many comments made by Conservative Members are based is that railcards are an economically profitable spec for British Rail. They are not. That is made clear in a document that is crucial to the debate. If Conservative Members have not read the document, they should have. It is a discussion document on network benefits drawn up by the Secretary of State's

[Mr. Wilson]

Department. The document contains the figures on the disabled persons railcard, which I shall deal with in a moment, and on other railcards.

The document states that, while those railcards are profitable overall, they are not moneyspinners. In 1991-92, the senior citizens railcard went into deficit, and the discount rate had to be changed to restore profitability the following year. So the senior citizens railcard is not profitable; it exists because of British Rail's decision to have it as a social benefit. That is the reality. That is why there is a distinction between British Rail operating the benefits and a plethora of private operators with different motivations being asked to operate them.

Let us examine some of the other conclusions of the document:

"Private operators, whose profitability will depend on filling seats, can be expected to exploit modern yield management techniques fully. We believe it would be wrong to tie their hands by requiring the perpetuation of the current range of Railcards."

That is the basis on which the Secretary of State has hitherto proceeded.

Of course, the Secretary of State has climbed down today by bringing the young persons railcard and the senior citizens railcard into the same category as the disabled persons railcard. But it is instructive to examine why the disabled persons railcard was provided for in the first place. Again, shamefully, it has nothing to do with social concern. It has nothing to do with the idea that disabled people have rights and that it is a good social ethos that they should be given reduced cost travel to liberate them and enhance their lives.

In one of the most cynical sections of the document, the case of disabled persons railcards was discussed:

"There would undoubtedly be strong criticism of a policy of allowing the market to decide the future of Railcards. This would be particularly intense in the case of the Disabled Persons Railcard . . . Ministers will want to consider whether there is a case for making an exception for this Card. Financially, the Card is not very significant one way or the other—around 40,000 Cards were sold in 1991-92 with a revenue of around £0·5 million from Card sales, and £2·5 million from fares . . . Many operators might decide"—

I hope that Conservative Members will listen to this, because it is a lesson for the future—

"that the public relations benefits of continuing to offer discounts to disabled people are well worth any small cost. But this is by no means certain and would be an insufficient counter to those who would seek to argue that the Government was being callous in not guaranteeing the continuation of these Cards. On the other hand, a decision to offer such a guarantee would be unwelcome to operators; it would amount to direct intervention in their decisions about ticket pricing and would limit their commercial freedom."

So there we have the reality. Private operators will not want to operate the railcards and it is acknowledged that they would not even accept the disabled persons railcard if it was not imposed on them. The Government recognise that, for public relations benefits, they must maintain an obligation to operate the disabled persons railcard. Therefore, it is presented as a virtue in the Bill.

On exactly the same basis, they have decided that the public relations benefits of including the senior citizens railcard and young persons railcard in the same category is overwhelming. That is the decision which has been taken now. But exactly the same doubts exist that pressures will come to bear on the franchising director not to impose those conditions because of the economic consequences and because the operators do not want them in the first place.

4.15 pm

By not writing into the Bill the continuation of these schemes, the Government are putting them, in any recognisable form, in jeopardy. If any Government Member wishes to support the view expressed in this document as to the only reason why it was necessary to continue the disabled persons rail scheme, this is the time to do so. That is the logic of it.

Of course, what is announced today is an advance, a step forward; at least these two other cards have been brought into the same category. It is a step forward that was bitterly resisted throughout Committee, not by the Secretary of State, because he was not present, but by the Minister and all the little echoes behind him, who voted quite specifically on the instructions of the Whips to deny any further concessions on railcards.

We now have these concessions, but they still leave out many categories, and must still be seen against the background of the operators not wanting them and working from day one, if these operators ever come into being, to get rid of them; and of the political decision not lying with the Government, but resting at arm's length with the franchising director, who will be able to interpret how these matters should be applied.

That, I am afraid, is the message. It is an advance; it is better than what was there before; at least some lip service is paid to the idea that there will be senior citizens and young persons railcards, although the network benefits in the south-east for families are apparently to be cast aside. But these are not guarantees, and they will not be seen as guarantees.

The only way to safeguard the benefits of the network is to safeguard the network itself. The fragmentation of and the risks to those benefits are an inevitable consequence of the fundamental decision to break up the railways.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am a signatory to this new clause and I fully endorse everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) has said. Like him, I welcome very much indeed the concessions, the announcement, the statement, the assurance, given by our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) will concede that I am not one of those Back-Bench Tory Members who are easily bought off. Certainly, I do not have a history of that, and for as long as I am in the House I do not intend to establish a history of being easily bought off.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also concede that those of us who expressed grave concern about the omissions from the initial legislation were particularly concerned about the position of the elderly, the retired, the old-age pensioners. We were also particularly concerned about young people and, of course, as the Government showed that they were in the legislation, about the disabled.

Certainly I, and I believe my hon. Friends, wanted to see written into the Bill assurances that travelcards in respect of the elderly, the young and the disabled would be included in the legislation.

I have been in the House for a few years, and I believe that the assurance that has been given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is as close as anyone can get to having what we want written on to the face of the Bill. My right hon. Friend has stated that he will be giving a very clear directive to the franchising director that, in considering allocating and awarding the franchises, these railcards must be included. That assurance is good enough for me.

I represent an area in which railways are particularly important and in which the elderly and the young frequently use railways, both local services and inter-city, to go north and south, from Macclesfield to Manchester, from Macclesfield south to Congleton, and through to Stoke. I have had numerous letters from constituents asking me to ensure, as far as is possible, that in this legislation we get a commitment from the Government that the position of the elderly, the young and the disabled will be taken fully into account.

I say again to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North, who spoke with some passion from the Opposition Front Bench, that Conservative Members have obtained sufficient assurance not to push the new clause to a Division, but to accept in the spirit that it has been given the very firm assurance by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

I hope that the Opposition accept the distance which the Government have gone in seeking to meet the concerns that have rightly been expressed by the elderly and the young. I give credit to the Government, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State that the disabled had already been taken into account. I believe that the directive is the assurance that the elderly and the young wanted, and I am happy to accept it.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I would not say that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) is easily fobbed off, but I urge him not to accept at face value everything his right hon. Friend has said.

The Secretary of State has moved some way, and obviously we are delighted, although the cynics amongst us would say it takes an impending defeat for such a gush of social concern to flow from the Government Front Bench. The right hon. Gentleman has not yet said specifically that all franchisees will accept a national scheme for all cards. If he has said that, that is fine and we have made some progress, but he did not cover every scheme. One card that has not been mentioned so far in the debate is of great benefit to one of the few flourishing industries we have left—there are not many after 14 years of Tory government.

We sell tourism by promising people the use of a BritRail card which enables incoming tourists to use the entire British Rail network. Given that this barmy piece of legislation envisages some 20 franchisees, I wonder whether the Secretary of State has considered the BritRail card. I hope he will think carefully about it and give us some assurances.

I urge the hon. Member for Macclesfield and his hon. Friends to look closely at any legislation that the Government introduce on the lines of the Secretary of State's speech this afternoon.

The argument is continually waged that railcards are non-statutory. They were first introduced by the then much-maligned British Rail. Senior citizens railcards were issued on a national basis during the stewardship of Sir Peter Parker and the Conservative Administration took the first opportunity not to reappoint him.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) pointed out, since they were first introduced there have been misgivings amongst successor administrations of British Rail about their efficacy and their profitability. However, to withdraw them would have caused an enormous row and we have been reminded today that 650 hon. Members have written to the Secretary of State in protest.

The other myth is that it is in the commercial interests of operators to accept them. It is no such thing. One of the early batch of franchises is to be the former London-Tilbury-Southend line, a self-contained stretch of railway from Fenchurch Street to Southend shortly to have its own self-contained signalling system, at public expense, of course. It would not be in the commercial interests of any franchisee of the London-Tilbury-Southend line to accept travelcards. Future franchisees would want to keep their revenue to themselves. I shall explain in a moment why it is not in their commercial interests to do so.

I do not know whether Conservative Members are aware of the way in which revenues are allocated to different commercial concerns through the use of cards. In the bus industry, they are allocated on the basis of an annual census in which a percentage figure is arrived at and allocated to different bus operators in an area. I think I see the Minister for Transport in London nodding in assent to that. Many larger operators in various parts of the country are desperate to get out of the schemes because they feel that their revenues are being diluted unfairly by their participation in them.

Many larger operators in the bus industry are not promoting regional schemes—I appreciate that we do not have a national bus scheme—available on every company's buses in a region but are promoting heavily their own schemes which are available on only their own services. I advise the hon. Member for Macclesfield and others to look carefully at any assurances given by the Secretary of State not only on pensioners railcards—although I appreciate that that is the main concern of the hon. Member for Macclesfield—but on the other railcards to which I referred to ensure that a genuinely national scheme is forced on franchisees, because forced on them it will have to be.

I remind the Secretary of State, who has been dragged kicking and screaming into the Chamber to make this afternoon's concession, that when some municipal bus undertakings were privatised it was a condition of their privatisation that they accepted regional bus passes. It was widely felt among the managements that such acceptance would dilute their revenues.

I hope that Conservative Members who have indicated their voting intentions will go further and ensure that we are talking about a national scheme for pensioners and others and will not allow any doubt to creep in. Nor should they leave franchise directors with any leeway to decide, depending on the profitability of views of individual franchisees, that only a local or regional scheme will be acceptable.

I urge Conservative Members not to listen to the Secretary of State but to examine what is happening. The hon. Member for Macclesfield referred to what is taking place in his part of the country, and I am not exactly a

[Mr. Peter Snape]

stranger to his constituency. I spent the early part of 1971 trying to ensure that he never made it to Parliament. Alas; I was unsuccessful and he has been here ever since.

If the hon. Gentleman catches the train north to Manchester, he will find in place the Manchester metrolink service. It is in place only because of the insistence of the passenger transport executive that through travel ticketing arrangements be accepted. Manchester metrolink was extremely reluctant to accept that. It wanted to run its own self-contained strategy of a modern tramway and did not want its revenues diluted by a regional scheme—regional in that case, but national in the context of our debate.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ashford (Sir. K. Speed), among others, will press the matter to a Division and will clearly show the Secretary of State that there is no scope for wriggling on the issue. Let us insist on a national scheme.

Mr. Cormack: The House will be delighted that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) failed in 1971 to prevent my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) from being elected. Think what we would have been deprived of had he succeeded. It was interesting to hear the speech of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East. I had hoped that he would be making it from the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Snape: I have made too many from there.

Mr. Cormack: Not too many for some of us. I hope that he makes many more from the Opposition Front Bench. After all, the hon. Gentleman who spoke from that position, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), was, to put it mildly, rather churlish. He had obviously carefully prepared a speech and arrived here thinking that the Secretary of State would not meet us on the issue.

Mr. Wilson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I do live in the real world. I read the newspapers, and I came here today knowing that a deal would have been stitched up, that the rebels could go quietly away and that there would be a major climbdown, as there has been. I appreciate that, but I reserve the right to point out to Conservative Members the inadequacies of the climbdown.

Mr. Cormack: The tone of that intervention was better for the hon. Gentleman's blood pressure than was his speech. I was afraid that he might do himself an injury while he was fulminating at the Dispatch Box.

This afternoon has been a classic example of a well orchestrated campaign, to which our listening Secretary of State has responded. I promised our friend, the late Robert Adley, that I would support any new clause along the lines of this one; indeed, I talked to him about it just a day or two before his heart attack. I renewed that promise to my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), to whom I pay tribute for his organisation of the campaign and the forceful moderation with which he has pursued it.

4.30 pm

We were concerned about two categories of people. The disabled had already been catered for, but we were worried about the elderly and the young. Perhaps, like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I should declare an interest: I have a mother who is 83 today, who enjoys using her railcard from time to time. I have a son who has the good sense to be at university in Scotland and who regularly uses his railcard. Both of them were apprehensive at the suggestion that the facility might not continue.

We all have a number of duties in this place. One of them is to speak up for those least able to articulate for themselves. Another is not to spread alarm and despondency when there is no need to do so. Until my right hon. Friend's speech there was a degree of anxiety throughout the country that, in the wake of sweeping changes—I do not welcome all of them—certain facilities which were not statutorily guaranteed but which were much valued would be withdrawn.

Because of this, the late Robert Adley and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford decided, on the eve of these momentous changes to our rail system, that we must include this provision in the legislation. My right hon. Friend has always, in every post, had the reputation of being a listening Minister. I know from school teachers in my constituency that he was much appreciated as Secretary of State for Education and Science. He has listened carefully and he has conceded that we have a real point. He has promised that in another place the legislation will be suitably amended.

In so doing, my right hon. Friend has not only met the widespread apprehension and responded sensibly to Members on both sides of the House; he has also, in the process, shot the fox of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North. I do think that the hon. Gentleman should be a little more welcoming, a little less churlish. We should all be united in our concern for the elderly, the disabled and the young, and in our desire to achieve as good a rail system as we can for the 21st century.

The Bill has already been improved in some particulars; I hope that it will be further improved in others. Without seeking to disguise the fact, we should all be thankful to the Secretary of State for listening and responding so positively. I am delighted that he has done so.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I warmly welcome the Government's announcement—all the more so because of the length of time that it has taken to come. We remember the vociferous way in which the Government have resisted anything of this sort hitherto, so it is all the more remarkable that they have conceded it now.

Powerful and elegant though the speeches by the hon. Members for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) and for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) were, nothing that they said today was new or had not been said on Second Reading, in an Opposition supply day debate, in Committee—frequently—and again in these debates.

I suspect that at some point in their private discussions they must have said something even more powerful, if slightly less elegant, to the Secretary of State. I think that this says something about the benefits to the House of the Government having a small majority. It may have been the anticipation of a slightly smaller majority in the future that brought pensioners to the forefront of Government thinking.

I echo the points made about other types of network card that have not been referred to, particularly the London card. Yesterday's announcement about the Government's future intentions in terms of franchises suggests that the commuter services around London—which are currently all operated by one operator, Network SouthEast—may in future be operated by seven or eight

franchisees. Bus deregulation is coming to London and I do not think it is unduly fanciful to expect that the London underground network may be run on a line-by-line basis at some point in the future. We are looking at a multiplicity of operators in the area of Greater London, instead of the two or three that we have at the moment.

Although it is fair and right for the Government to say that none of these operators currently has a statutory obligation to participate in the London travelcard scheme, consumer groups and others seeking to persuade the operators of the benefits of the scheme currently have to persuade only two or three operators; in future they may have to persuade 12, 15, 20—goodness knows how many —to participate in a scheme of this sort.

It is worth noting that the new clause does not try to set particular percentages of reductions that should be given, or set in stone the character of any card or benefit that should be available. It simply seeks to enshrine the principle that operators should participate in some network benefit. I think that the argument should continue that the other benefits—not only in London, but the BritRail card and others—are worth including in the legislation. I think that future operators should be required to participate in a network scheme, without trying to set in stone what the benefits or characteristics of such network arrangements should be.

Sir Keith Speed: My right hon. Friend has given a very positive reply and I am sure that it includes the inter-modal card. I see that my right hon. Friend wishes to intervene, so I will give way.

Mr. MacGregor: May I say something? It will take a little time, but it is important that I say it because my hon. Friend and others have raised it in the debate. May I make another intervention, by leave of the House?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I do not think that the Secretary of State needs the leave of the House to intervene; but, by tradition, interventions are short and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will comply with that principle as far as possible.

Mr. MacGregor: I will try to do so, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, my hon. Friend wanted me to comment on the travelcard and I would like to explain the position because it is important that everyone understands where we are.

Travelcard is rightly popular and has brought the benefits of simplicity and value for money to the public. It has been highly beneficial to the operators because it is a powerful marketing tool that has increased patronage. It is in the interests of both passengers and the new railway operators that it should continue.

There is a problem, however. Subsection (3) of the new clause was intended to cover that problem. I mentioned that the clause was defective: it is defective in this case, for example. It would not be possible for the Railways Bill to impose any requirement on the providers of other kinds of public transport service to accept multi-modal ticketing arrangements. The powers of the franchising director relate only to the provision of railway services.

Under the Bill as already drafted, the franchising director will have the power to require franchisees to participate in the travelcard scheme. I propose to give guidance on the exercise of that power. Franchisees will then be required to participate in accordance with their franchise agreement. I think that the same mechanism could be used to secure participation in the travelcard-type systems that exist outside London, but that would have to be done in conjunction with the passenger transport executives.

Sir Keith Speed: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, which reinforces my desire to seek the leave of the House to withdraw the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it the wish of the House that leave be given? [HON. MEMBERS: "Aye".]

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I hope that Conservative Members will not regard it as churlish, but we have just had a fresh announcement in the form of an intervention in a speech about withdrawing the new clause. I do not think that one has to be a devotee of "Erskine May" to regard that as an odd way to proceed. I would have hoped that it would have been possible to have further clarification from the Minister on his statement on the London travelcard, which was thrown in as an intervention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is simple. Any hon. Member may disagree with the proposal that the motion be withdrawn. Then we proceed with the debate.

Mr. Wilson: I wish to object to the motion being withdrawn until we have had a modest discussion on the London travelcard and the implication of the Secretary of State's announcement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) has helped to clarify the position. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that under the Bill he will meet what my hon. Friend has asked for. It seems unreasonable to prolong the debate by asking my right hon. Friend to say that what cannot go in the Bill should be covered by it.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I apologise for not agreeing with the hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) that we should make progress. The Government have moved on the point and perhaps we should make progress, but I want to make one point.

No doubt the Secretary of State's guarantee will be as good as his word and he will ensure that appropriate amendments are made in another place. However, it is possible that the cards will become disused by attrition. For example, a high joining fee might be sought; instead of the normal £10 or £15, perhaps £35 will have to be paid. If so, many pensioners could not put that amount up in front to have the benefits of a card.

Alternatively, the percentage discount might come down. Because of the impoverished state of British Rail, discounts have come down recently. The half-price discount might be reduced to 33 per cent. It is not inconceivable that a franchisee who was not enamoured by having to obey the legislation would give discounts of only 10 per cent. or 15 per cent. and thereby make the cards unattractive to pensioners. I hope that there is no unwritten agenda and that travelcards will be protected by the legislation and will generally cost the same and give the same benefits as at present.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): May I add my endorsement of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) in moving the amendment and

[Mr. Tim Rathbone]

make an addendum to what he said? In my hon. Friend's speech and in the speeches of other hon. Members on both sides of the House the accent has been on the pleasure aspect of concessionary travelcards, in other words, their use by old people to go on holiday or by young people to travel wherever they wish.

There is a need imperative. In my constituency old people use trains to go to the nearest town to do their weekly shopping. That is important. Students use trains to get to where they are studying. There is more to the point than the pleasure motive and I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has responded to the pressure.

I join other hon. Members in asking for further clarification about the London travelcard. That, too, is important to my constituents. The principle is important to people in constituencies near large metropolitan areas. Like the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), I would welcome more elucidation from the Secretary of State. What he announced briefly is a step in the right direction, as was his reaction to other amendments. I welcome that and thank him for it.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): While I, too, would welcome further clarification of the Secretary of State's announcement about the London travelcard, may I say to the hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) and his hon. Friends that the concerns for the elderly, the young and the disabled which were so eloquently expressed by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) were equally eloquently expressed in Committee by Opposition Members? On that occasion those concerns, which still remain, fell on deaf ears.

4.45 pm

I hope that hon. Members will not consider it churlish on my part to say that what has occasioned the Secretary of State's change of heart is a response not to the cries of his hon. Friends or, indeed, the travel needs of the elderly, the young and the disabled, but possibly to the report from the Save Our Railways campaign in which a poll of more than 5,500 Conservative voters in 58 Tory marginal seats showed that if the Bill went through Parliament unaltered at least 38 Tory Members might lose their seats.

Mr. Wilson: With the leave of the House, Madam Speaker. It is essential to place on record our astonishment at the way in which the Government continue to handle the Bill. We have had months of debate. We had 36 sittings in Committee, many of them devoted to issues of network benefit. Railcards and travelcards were raised repeatedly and discussed at great length. With the exception of the railcard for disabled persons, the Government said repeatedly that nothing would be done. Specifically on the London travelcard, the answer was the same.

We were waiting today for a clear-cut statement of intent. We got something for pensioners and young people and we welcome it unreservedly, but even then the Minister could not make a clear statement on what would be done about travelcards. We had a shambolic announcement in the form of an intervention which still does not tell us whether the London travelcard will live or die, because not only the franchising director but someone else will have to be consulted.

If the campaign to save the London travelcard has been successful, it will be a tremendous victory which will be widely appreciated in London. If we have forced that out of the Government at this late stage, it is a great success, but what a humiliation for Tory Members who served on the Standing Committee and who did not even ask for it, far less receive it. By the same token, what a humiliation it is for Tory Members who accepted meekly in Committee that there was to be no movement on railcards for senior citizens or young people. Now apparently the threat of rebellion by a dozen Tories has achieved what the 14 on the Standing Committee did not dare ask for.

Let us have, perhaps at another time and in better order, a detailed statement from the Secretary of State on the prospects of the London travelcard so that they can be studied and discussed. While railcards for senior citizens and young people have been hard fought for by my hon. Friends, by some Tory Members and by the public, today's announcement will not end all the uncertainty. It covers only 700,000 of the 2·3 million people who have railcards.

Mr. MacGregor: The reason why I made the remarks about the travelcard was that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), perhaps sensing the mood of the House better than I had, wanted to bring the debate to a close. I had requests for a statement on the position of the travelcard. That is why I intervened.

Since the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) did not allow the debate to finish, let me point out to him that there was nothing strange about my statement. I am beginning to think that the hon. Gentleman would wax indignant about what he had for breakfast. He seems to go over the top on every occasion.

With regard to travelcards, the position is very simple and has been stated very clearly. It is not possible to go beyond the Bill's provisions and require the franchising director to impose conditions in respect of transport other than railways. Such a provision cannot be included in the Railways Bill and that is why I have suggested another way forward. It is the right way to proceed, as I hope my statement has made quite clear.

Sir Keith Speed: As I am totally content with my right hon. Friend's statement, I wish, with the leave of the House, to withdraw the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that that is impossible. An hon. Member may not ask twice for the same thing. I shall therefore put the new clause to the House—a procedure which will not necessarily force a Division.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 24

EXISTING PASSENGER SERVICE OPERATORS AND ASSOCIATES TO BE ELIGIBLE AS FRANCHISEES

"(1) Notwithstanding anything in section 22 of this Act, a public sector operator shall be eligible to be a franchisee if at the date on which this Act was passed—

(a) that operator, or

(b) any other body of which that operator was at that date, or is at the time when the franchise agreement is made, the subsidiary or holding company,

was providing or operating services for the carriage of passengers by railway in the exercise of a function conferred by or under any enactment.

(2) For the purposes of this section "subsidiary" and "holding company" shall be construed in accordance with section 736 of the Companies Act 1985.'.—*[Mr. Prescott.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 29, in clause 22, page 23, leave out from beginning of line 41 to end of line 19 on page 24.

No. 43, in page 23, line 41, after '(1)', insert 'Subject to subsection (1A) below,'.

No. 44, in page 24, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) The provisions of subsection (1) above shall not apply to any public sector operator who at the date on which this Act received Royal Assent had a statutory power, duty or obligation to provide or operate any public railway passenger service.'.

No. 57, in page 24, line 16, at end insert—

'(1A) Nothing in subsection (1) shall prevent—
(a) the British Railways Board (in this Act referred to as "the Board"); or
(b) a wholly owned subsidiary of the Board,
from being a franchisee.'.

No. 32, in page 24, in clause 23, line 34, at end add—

'(4) The Board shall always be invited to tender by the Franchising Director.'.

No. 56, in clause 27, page 28, line 17, leave out from 'the' to end of line 18 and insert 'Board'.

No. 47, in clause 72, page 80, leave out line 38 and insert—

'"Public sector operator" means—
(a) any Minister of the Crown, Government department or other emanation of the Crown;
(b) any local authority;
(c) any metropolitan county passenger transport authority;
(d) any body corporate whose members are appointed by a Minister of the Crown, a Government department, a local authority or a metropolitan county passenger transport authority or by a body corporate whose members are so appointed;
(e) a company—
(i) a majority of whose issued shares are held by or on behalf of any of the bodies or persons falling within paragraphs (a) to (d) above;
(ii) in which the majority of the voting rights are held by or on behalf of any of those bodies or persons;
(iii) a majority of whose board of directors can be appointed or removed by any of those bodies or persons; or
(iv) in which the majority of the voting rights are controlled by any of those bodies or persons, pursuant to an agreement with other persons (and expressions used in sub-paragraphs (i) to (iv) above in section 736 of the Companies Act 1985 have the same meaning in those sub-paragraphs as they have in that section);
(f) a subidiary of a company falling within paragraph (e) above;'.

Mr. Prescott: The debate on new clause 12 characterised the attitude that the Government have adopted throughout the debates on the Bill—immediate changes, a few minutes' consideration without any proper assessment. As usual, the Government are making up policy as they go along. That has been pointed out in a very powerful way. The new clause raises another principle that was endorsed by Robert Adley: if the House is disposed to support an hon. Member's argument on one occasion, it should do so subsequently. Robert Adley felt very strongly about British Rail's right to bid for franchises. The change of mind shown by the Secretary of State's immediate decision was brought about by pressure on the Floor of the House. The Government were totally indifferent to similar pressure in the Standing Committee.

I cannot help feeling that we have here something of a north-south division. It is accepted that there should be a statutory requirement to provide a pensioners pass in London, but not in areas outside London. Action is being taken because of the sensitivities in the southern area. I hope that the Secretary of State recognises that we are dealing here with a national matter. Decisions should not be influenced by geographical or political considerations. I hope that northern Members will fight as hard for their constituents as southern Members clearly have done.

British Rail's right to bid for franchises reflects an ideological position taken by the Government rather than common sense. This is a matter of common sense, and I hope that it will be considered in that light. New clause 24 would give British Rail the right to bid for franchises, of which the House was notified in a statement yesterday. BR should have the same bidding rights as any other operator. It certainly has all the necessary experience.

As drafted, the Bill will not permit public sector operators to bid for franchises. Evidence about the effectiveness of privately owned or privately operated railways is to be found in Sweden. The Swedish counterpart of British Rail was allowed to bid. I understand that of the 21 franchises that have been granted, 17 have been won by the state operation. It appears that the Swedish Government regarded the bid from the most experienced operator as the best one. Unless it is felt that the British public sector is not as good as the Swedish public sector, BR's management should be allowed to bid.

The Secretary of State will probably say that the management may bid if they do so by way of a buy-out procedure. Apparently, managers bidding for franchises will be those who currently run the public sector operation. The essential difference will arise from their introduction to the disciplines and philosophy of the market. As private owners, they will be intent on satisfying their own greed rather than meeting public need.

There is far too much ideology here. It is assumed that private must be good and public must be bad. That is not borne out by the evidence in this country or abroad. The Government seem to think that privatisation encourages a commercial ethos and enterprise which will result in a better service for the public. I concede that there is probably as much bad management in the public sector as in the private sector, but there is little to be gained from point-scoring about the failures of management. The skills of managers, like those of the work force, are much less well developed in this country than they are abroad. That is a sad reflection on our training and on our priorities in management and worker skills.

The Government have taken the view that this is all about competition, but they have not proved that case, either. In fact, competition is not being allowed. In this regard, the practicalities are extremely difficult. What is proposed is the transformation of a public monopoly into a private monopoly. Where franchises are granted, it is unlikely that the operators will have their own rolling stock. The Government have proposed that the rolling stock should be owned by leasing companies. The reason

[Mr. Prescott]

is that the contract time envisaged for franchising is about seven years—considerably less than one would expect for rolling stock leasing. This, the concept of private ownership and competition, is watered down.

This is not competition; it is the granting of an exclusive right to an operator. An undertaking that does not even own its assets will be expected to contribute the essential private managerial flair which, it is argued, will be available in the private sector. It is contended that when public managers go private, they will be much better at managing. Again, that has not been proved.

We have been told that franchising is not now to be limited to the seven services that were announced in 1993. There are to be a further 18, making a total of 25. The additions account for most of the remaining two thirds of the system. The Secretary of State has not yet made up his mind about what should happen to the cross-country systems. He said yesterday that certain services would be exempt from the provisions of the Bill. A very important exemption is the British end of the European railway system through the channel tunnel. I assume that, for reasons connected with joint contracts and complicated European affairs, those services will not be offered for franchise. Presumably, they will remain under the control of British Rail. In other words, British Rail will continue to be an entity in this field. With the exception of the rolling stock on lines connecting with Europe, it may well have to lease back its own stock. That will create problems. In any case, BR will continue to be an important operator for at least the remainder of the century, irrespective of what happens in elections.

British Rail will continue to play an important part in respect of freight, too. Nevertheless, it will almost be the operator of last resort. If an operator does not provide the service, someone will ring up British Rail, almost as though it were the Automobile Association, and say, "Come and operate this system because the private sector operator has gone bust." As distinct from the public sector, if a private sector operator finds that it can no longer meet its financial commitments and is bankrupt, it will be obliged to cease trading and the service may stop. The Secretary of State may argue that the franchising director would take over the service and run it. Presumably, he would become the operator in those circumstances and then readvertise them.

5 pm

A transport system must operate 24 hours a day. The public rely on it because it is a crucial part of any industrial operation. Franchise operation 19, covering south London and the Sussex coast, has been identified by the Secretary of State as one for which private sector operators can bid. It is also the operation in which Mr. Sherwood of Sea Containers was very interested. What happens if most potential operators take Mr. Sherwood's view that the coast run from Southampton to Hastings is not very profitable?

Although it is true that many people travel on that line and that it uses clapped-out stock, Mr. Sherwood still does not want to run it. He offered to bid for the rest of the system, with the exception of the Reigate-Tonbridge line. If other operators are of the same view, either the network will have to be changed or someone will have to come in and pick up the bits that Mr. Sherwood or others judge are not profitable—and that someone will be British Rail. That is not an effective way to run a railway system, because it would break up the whole basis of the network in what would be one of the most congested parts of any railway system. There will be increasing concern about that—particularly among Conservative Members, when they realise the consequences for the rail services in their constituencies.

As the Bill progresses, Conservative Members will not necessarily have the luxury enjoyed by the hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) in negotiating with the Secretary of State to save particular travelcards and concessions. They will have to queue up at the door of the franchising operator—not spend time in a smoke-filled room pressurising the Secretary of State, knowing that the right hon. Gentleman has to come to the House and vote for or against a particular proposal. The luxury of accountability will be lost to right hon. and hon. Members, because the House will have delegated to the franchising director the right to make such decisions.

Anyone who complains to the franchising director will be reminded of the objectives that he has been set in the name of competition. He will say, "You placed those obligations on me, and if I do not observe them, I can be sued by another operator." Any chance to make decisions about the transport system and to put pressure on the Secretary of State as an essential part of public accountability will be sacrificed. Although the right hon. Gentleman may hope that there can be bids for the network definition contained in his document, he has already made it clear that much will depend on operators picking and choosing. We must wait and see.

In Committee, the Secretary of State reserved the right to control the franchising director's actions until July 1996 —an interesting political period, just before the next general election. The right hon. Gentleman is retaining certain powers so that he can oversee any difficulties with Network SouthEast, with all the political implications that that has, as we have seen recently. The services will not be franchised in the way that the Secretary of State suggests; instead, the network will be broken up, and British Rail will be expected to intervene as the operator of last resort to provide certain services.

Mr. Sherwood made it clear that, apart from not wanting to run certain lines, he expected freedom to charge what he liked. I do not know what decision the Secretary of State has made in regard to the amendment debated yesterday and any capping of fares. I look forward to hearing his remarks later, when the House will have an opportunity to vote on that amendment. Mr. Sherwood asked also for tax relief on season tickets. He clearly knows what he wants by way of a profitable deal—but it would cost taxpayers a lot more, they would get a lot less for their money and fares would be considerably higher. Grave doubts remain about bids being left in the hands of private operators, with no services being provided by British Rail.

In the past few weeks, we have seen how much public opinion is swinging in favour of retaining British Rail, whatever criticisms might be made of it—and despite the fact that everyone knows that it is under-invested compared with European railways. Its financial support is only some 20 per cent. of that in Europe, which puts a great deal more into its railway systems, however one measures that. Europe has the common sense to acknowledge that if one places a rail network in the hands of entrepreneurs, they will be interested only in making a

profit. Their whole rationale is to make money, and their profits will have to be financed by a raft of subsidies that would increase the public sector obligation.

Mr. Rathbone: The hon. Gentleman referred to a part of British Rail's network that affects my constituency. Many people have been deeply worried by scaremongering of the type in which the hon. Gentleman has indulged this afternoon—saying that this line will be closed down, that service will be stopped and fares will be increased. The truth is that Mr. Sherwood made an awful blunder when he made those statements, because he ruled himself out as a franchisee. The people in his company know that. His public relations adviser leapt down Mr. Sherwood's throat the day after he made that announcement on television, because he knew that it wiped Mr. Sherwood out of consideration as a franchisee on those terms.

Mr. Prescott: I have often been told by Conservative Members not to lecture business men because they know what is in their own interest. I assume that Mr. Sherwood knew what he was talking about. After all, he took the Government to the cleaners when all the ports were privatised and he bought Sealink for about £40 million, and then sold the Isle of Wight services alone for £100 million. Mr. Sherwood made an awful lot of money out of the Government. If I were asked to judge whether the Government or Mr. Sherwood has the best commercial judgment, my money would be on Mr. Sherwood. I quoted him because he was to make one of the bids. Most of the other potential operators that the Secretary of State tells us about dare not raise their heads.

As to Mr. Branson of the Virgin Group, since it was announced that he could not cherry-pick and enjoy open access, he is no longer interested. Stagecoach was also supposed to be interested. The service that it ran from Scotland lasted only four months. A change from public to private ownership brought collapse in four months, and then good old British Rail had to take over and restore the service. The public appreciate that where British Rail does not maintain a service, the private sector will look after its own interests.

The argument is made that public management of British Rail is bad—but according to the White Paper, the Select Committee, and *The Economist* survey, British Rail's labour productivity is far in advance of any European system. That did not start with the present Government but has been true for 20 years, as studies made in the early 1970s show. As an innovator, British Rail introduced fast trains on conventional tracks and developed container ships ahead of anyone else. It has introduced innovation and techniques of which we can be proud.

The problem is that the Government took £3 billion from British Rail's public subsidy, and it shows. There has been some attempt to regain that ground but—under, I admit, a number of Governments—British Rail has never received enough money to replace clapped-out rolling stock, most of which was ordered in the mid-1950s. That is the reason for its financial problems.

It is argued that privatisation is better, and British Airways is often quoted in that context—but it had a massive writing-off of its debts. There was a change in Treasury rules, and British Airways made most of its profits at a time when it was a private company in public ownership. In many cases, the same management were involved. To that extent, we cannot draw comfort from the suggestion that a change in ownership leads to an improvement. We must change the rules and some of the Treasury's attitudes to the public sector—we have been somewhat stupid about that—and we must recognise that simply changing the ownership is not sufficient to guarantee that the consumer is better off.

Anyone who doubts that should ask Mr. Branson of Virgin whether British Airways is better under private ownership. Under public ownership, we could have sacked the board and chairman of British Airways for some of their deplorable practices and made it clear that such practices are not acceptable. As it is a private company, we cannot do so. The Secretary of State says that we cannot interfere and, despite my protests, the Civil Aviation Authority takes a similar view.

The assumption that privatisation leads to improvements is not borne out by the examples of Tiger Rail and Charterail, which collapsed shortly after opening. Circumstances were difficult for them and their failure might not have resulted from poor management: other factors caused difficulties whether companies are publicly or privately owned.

Can anybody say that bus privatisation has improved the bus industry? Five-year studies show that buses are older and that fares are twice as high. Services are poorer and the network is smaller. A privatised bus company has not met the requirements of a public network service.

Mr. David Martin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I do not have time.

Interestingly, the Government did not deny the publicly owned bus service the right to bid for franchises. Much evidence tends to show that it is possible to allow public or private management to operate such services.

We have a good opportunity to measure public management against private management. If the Secretary of State wants to go ahead with the privatisation of the east coast line, which may be more attractive to an entrepreneur, why not inject the £1 billion into the west coast line, where it is desperately needed, in the way that I have suggested—through a combination of leasing and different financing arrangements—and let the public sector run it? Let us have a competition between the strategic east and west coast lines to see which management performs best. I could readily accept that spur of competition, but it is not proposed under the Bill.

One of the great difficulties is that British Rail may feel that it has no further role and that there is no need to improve because it will eventually be completely eliminated. That is wrong and the absurdity of it is emphasised by the fact that under European regulations French and other European rail companies will be exempt from franchise agreements and will be able to take over franchises on the east or west coast line. French rail companies can run our railways, but British Rail cannot. If that is not ideological nonsense from the Government, I do not know what is.

The Government will not be able to prevent such takeovers because they are at the heart of decision making in Europe. They believe in a free market and competition and believe that French or German rail companies should be allowed to bid, yet they will not extend that right to British Rail, which is absurd.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Prescott: No, I cannot; other hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Spearing: What about Union Rail?

Mr. Prescott: I am sure that my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to deal with that. As my hon. Friend suggests, Union Rail could make a bid because it, too, is exempt.

The new clause is a measure of good sense and I hope that the Secretary of State will consider it. It was well supported by Robert Adley, who constantly asked why British Rail cannot be allowed to bid for the franchise. If the Secretary of State wants to improve the Bill, the new clause is a useful and simple propositon. It would allow British Rail—which has the expertise, management skill and ability—the opportunity to show that, given the chance, it can operate services as well as anyone else. That is a fair opportunity for it, and without it British Rail will eventually become a second-class operation, offering only the services that other companies do not want. That is not a fair way to treat it. It would not be good for passengers and it certainly would not be good for British Rail. If the Secretary of State believes in competition, the least he can do is give British Rail an opportunity to compete.

5.15 pm

Mr. MacGregor: We know what the Labour party is seeking under the new clause—no change. It wants to continue with British Rail as it is. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that some of them acknowledge that.

Labour wants to continue with a monolithic, large state industry, with all the constraints and bureaucracies that that imposes, without the sharp incentives constantly to seek more customers—passenger and freight—that the private sector, through market pressures and disciplines, offers. That is what it hopes to achieve under the new clause.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) gives the impression that Labour would spend much more taxpayers' money on British Rail, but we all know that it would not.

I am the first to acknowledge the considerable improvements that have been made in British Rail in recent years and the organising for quality initiative and the move to profit centres have helped. A new group of senior managers have benefited from those changes and are keen to take advantage of the opportunities that privatisation offers and to take up franchises under management buy-outs. *[Interruption.]* I acknowledge that that has to happen. I have said that throughout, but most people acknowledge that there is a need for further change and for further improvement. A monolithic nationalised industry imposes restraints on thrusting managers, and most people recognise that change is needed.

But for the Labour party, the status quo is all very well, and that is what it aims to achieve under the new clause.

Mr. Prescott: What status quo?

Mr. MacGregor: The status quo of British Rail remaining entirely in the public sector and operating all the franchise areas.

I have discovered from discussions with my hon. Friends that their position is different, and I should like to deal with their concerns. Their first concern was about what would happen if no bid was made for a franchise or if no acceptable bid was made. I believe that the question of there being no bid is hypothetical, but the franchising director may conclude that a bid is not acceptable.

Their argument is: do we not need British Rail to ensure that services in a franchise area continue to operate? The system that we have designed ensures that there will be no problem, because if the franchising director does not grant a franchise in response to the invitation to tender, British Rail will continue to operate that service. That is the fail-safe.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, although I suspect that I will be less than helpful, for which I apologise. It is bizarre that apparently the Government do not think that British Rail is fit to tender, yet we shall rely on it if the franchise system breaks down. Surely there is some contradiction in that. Should not BR at least be given the option of bidding for services?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall deal with those concerns later.

If no bid is made for a franchise, there is not only the fail-safe; the position is better than that. We propose to set up shadow franchises. I announced yesterday what we think will be the remaining 18, but I made it clear that the figure is not set in stone. That fulfils our commitment to franchise the whole operation, but that will take place gradually with seven shadow franchises initially.

The purpose is to ensure that the franchise area makes good operational sense and to establish a financial track record. After the shadow franchise has been set up, it will have to operate for a period before the franchise director issues invitations to tender. That is fairly obvious. People need the financial track record and information before marshalling their bids. It means that the bids can be measured against British Rail's existing operations and financial track record.

If, in a particular case, the franchising director concludes that the bids do not give sufficient value for money compared with the existing British Rail operation, he will not grant the franchise. It will be a matter for the franchising director, and I do not want to interfere. Whether bids offer good value for money will be one of the conditions that the franchising director will have to bear in mind in granting franchises.

It could be argued, therefore, that the British Rail operation—what it is already achieving—is effectively a bid. If British Rail is allowed to bid separately, there will be other consequences, with which I shall deal in a moment. However, that is how the scheme will operate, and that is where there is a difference between this country and Sweden.

Sweden did not split the operation, thereby establishing a financial track record, so the basis for the bids was not the same. We have made it clear from the beginning that we are trying to inject private attitudes, discipline, marketing expertise and capital into the system. The existing Swedish railway had a huge advantage in making bids, with the result that only 3 per cent. of the bids went to the private sector.

Secondly——

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): If one of the people showing interest in one of the shadow franchises is involved in an alternative form of transport, he will have

access to all the information—that is the purpose of setting up a shadow franchise. However, our experience of the channel tunnel rail link negotiations has been that, whenever the public have asked for any information of the slightest use in working out how much money is available for amelioration or other purposes, they were told that such information was commercially sensitive.

What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and, if potential franchisees are allowed access to the information, so should the unfortunate people who are trying to defend themselves against the worse excesses of the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. MacGregor: We are talking about two different things. In relation to the British Rail reforms, we want competition for the franchises, so we must provide the information to ensure a fair competitive basis on which bids can be made. That will be one of the franchising director's responsibilities.

The second issue raised by my hon. Friend is very reasonable. The people who have over the years acquired the experience and skills to run the railways and who have delivered many of the recent improvements should have the opportunity to bid. In fact, they will have that opportunity and, I believe, to do so in a more attractive way than if they were operating simply as part of the monolithic British Rail structure. The opportunity will arise through management-employee buy-outs. In addition, we want to encourage such buy-outs and, as the House will know, we have arranged for financial assistance up to a limit of £100,000 to be provided to facilitate them.

Therefore, those who have been operating the railways will have opportunities. It is not surprising that we have received 30 expressions of interest; we cannot have bids at the moment, because there is nothing for which to bid. However, I assure the House that, as I have moved around the country, I have met a considerable number of British Rail senior managers—as have my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport and the franchising director—who are keen to bid on the basis of a management-employee buy-out. I want them to have the suppprt and backing of British Rail, which will come through the financial assistance, and not have British Rail as a competitor.

Mr. Prescott: I have received notice of a management buy-out seminar, which encourages managements to believe that the moneys available for the buy-outs or for the redundancies that could come with privatisation would be financed from the British Rail pension fund. Will the Secretary of State assure us that that will not be the case?

Mr. MacGregor: The money that would be used for financial assistance for the buy-outs would come from the British Rail pension fund?

Mr. Prescott: Or be used for the redundancies that may occur.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes, I can give that assurance.

I was saying that I believed that management-employee buy-outs are a more attractive proposition with added benefits, because they enable those who were formerly or are currently working for British Rail to make their bids. Many will form consortia with the private sector, which will bring real advantages.

I have dealt with two of the issues which my hon. Friends have raised with me. I hope that what I have said makes it clear that their fears about both can easily be met and that, in fact, there is a real advantage in turning the experience of those in British Rail into a management-employment buy-out.

There are several key points to the new clause. The purpose of our reforms is to get better passenger services by removing the constraints and bureaucracy of a huge nationalised industry, by adding private sector attitudes, approaches, disciplines, skills and experience to the commitment, skills and experience, of which there is an abundance among many British Rail staff.

It will be achieved by going into the private sector and restructuring passenger services into smaller units. Briefly, they are the ways in which we seek to get better passenger services. We shall not achieve that aim merely by allowing British Rail to bid knowing that it will have huge advantages in framing its bid. I shall deal with that point in a moment.

In relation to private sector involvement, invitations to tender are not only about getting more cost-effective services. Some people have referred to competitive tenders in local authorities as a parallel and said that people working in local authorities have been able to tender for services that they are already running. That was designed to achieve, and has achieved, considerable savings in local authorities by producing more cost-effective services.

We certainly seek savings in the competitive tenders for the franchise—I am confident that we shall get more cost-effective services—but there is another purpose, which is to develop new opportunities and create new markets for passenger services, an opportunity that does not exist in the tendering for local authority services. Those new opportunities are better achieved by going to the private sector.

In our debates I have frequently referred to the important issue of culture change. I continue to be struck by the fact that, when I meet managers who were formerly in nationalised industries and who now operate in the private sector in the same businesses, they frequently say that one of the most striking benefits of the privatisation process has been the culture change of having to operate in the marketplace and not within the public sector. That is why we seek to encourage management-employee buy-outs involving the private sector and to encourage competition with the private sector—management-employee buy-outs mean breaking the habits of a lifetime locked into a nationalised industry, public sector culture.

If the nationalised industry bids against management-employee buy-outs on terms that inevitably favour the nationalised industry, one jeopardises the change of culture.

Mr. Prescott: What about the French railways?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman keeps talking about French railways, but that is not a model that we wish to follow. The TGVs are very effective, but I have two points to put to him. First, many people draw attention to the inadequacies of the French railways, apart from the TGVs, and many pay tribute to our InterCity services. It is not a case of French railways being so much better than ours right across the board.

Secondly, the French taxpayer currently pays £1·3 billion a year to service the colossal debts carried by

[Mr. MacGregor]

SNCF. The equivalent latest figure for British Rail is £81 million, so it is not surprising that France's new Minister for Transport said that the French would have to tackle that problem. It is a heavy burden, and it is questionable whether that is the best use of scarce public expenditure.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend would recap so that I could try again to understand why managers who want to make a bid or to propose an even more efficient way of running a service should not be allowed to do so from within British Rail.

My right hon. Friend has convinced the House that it is reasonable to allow managers help to enable them to make a bid from outside BR, but we have not yet fully understood—at least, I have not fully understood—why they should not be able to make a competitive bid from within BR if they think that, within the organisation, they can make a better fist of it than they are allowed to do at present.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure whether my hon. Friend means that such people should be allowed to bid while they are still part of BR but as part of an independent management-employee buy-out, or that they should be allowed to bid because they are BR.

5.30 pm

Mr. Bottomley: It seems to me that there are three options. The first is that people can leave BR completely and bid from outside. The second is that they can get some kind of help—my right hon. Friend said that up to £100,000 per bid would be available—to enable them to bid as if in future they would not be within BR. The third option would be for managers to be able to say, from within BR, that that is the way in which they would like to run the service within the organisation. I have not yet been able to understand why that third option is excluded, and why such bids cannot be tested against the others.

Mr. MacGregor: Certainly the first two options are clear. People can leave BR; and people can be outside BR once the system is in operation. Managers will be allowed to remain within BR while they make their management-employee buy-out bid, but if the bid is successful, obviously they will have to move to a franchise outside BR.

The real distinction is between those options and the third option. My hon. Friend suggests that BR itself should be allowed to bid for the franchise, as the Opposition want——

Mr. Prescott: He has got it right.

Mr. MacGregor: Of course I have got it right; of course I understand it.

Mr. Prescott: Brilliant.

Mr. MacGregor: Thank you very much.

The third option would mean that people would bid not as a management buy-out or as a separate management, but as part of BR. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That is precisely why the Opposition want that third option. That is what I have been saying all the way through.

The Opposition want no change. They want BR to be able to manipulate the bids for the individual franchises —they will not all come at once—so that it will always be able to undercut the competition. The interesting question is how BR can justify the claim that it will carry on as it is under the system, yet will be able to make a bid at a much lower level than it is currently achieving in its financial track record. That is the interesting question.

Mr. Prescott: Yes.

Mr. MacGregor: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is following me, because we are now coming to the crunch.

The answer to that question is that private sector bidders, including management—employee buy-outs, will make a realistic assessment of the business prospects for each franchise. They will have to, because that will be in the nature of the bid. They will know how much subsidy they will get for the next five years if they are successful, and they will know the risk that they are taking.

They will know that they have to deliver what they believe they can achieve, and run a more cost-effective service according to all the terms of the contract, providing all the services, but at the same time increasing revenue. That is how the benefits will come. If BR were to bid against them——

Mr. Snape: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: Let me finish my sentence.

If BR were to bid against such a bid, it would always tend to make the most optimistic assumptions, believing that, if its forecasts proved unrealistic, somehow or other the taxpayer would be there in the background to bail it out. That is not the way to achieve either the cultural changes or the improvements. That is the fundamental difference, and that is why I cannot accept the amendments.

Furthermore, if it were felt that BR as a whole could bid for each franchise, that would undoubtedly undermine City interest. If BR were allowed to bid on every occasion, there would be a fear that it would be able to undercut every bid by one means or another. That is a crucial difference, and it is the reason why I cannot accept the amendment.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My right hon. Friend has talked about the reasons why BR should not be able to bid for a franchise. Will he answer a specific question which he has been asked before in private meetings but to which, so far as I know, he has not yet given a full reply—he has certainly not given me a full reply? Is it not technically possible for the French railways to bid for a franchise within the United Kingdom? My right hon. Friend may say that that is unlikely, or that the French railways has suggested that it does not intend to make a bid, but is it technically possible?

Mr. MacGregor: That is technically possible, but I should stress that the purpose of our policy, as we have made clear, is to introduce private sector management and expertise into the operation of the railways.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich) *rose——*

Mr. MacGregor: Will the hon. Lady let me finish?

At this stage, the draft guidance to the franchising director—there will be further drafts, but there will eventually be guidance and instructions to the franchising director—makes it clear that his principal objective will be

"to secure as soon as reasonably practicable . . . that the function of providing passenger railway services in Great Britain is performed by private sector operators".

The franchising director will therefore want to examine most carefully any proposed bid involving a foreign public sector railway operator in order to find out whether that bid will assist him in meeting his primary objective.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: It is for all of those reasons that I believe that the Labour party——

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I can answer questions later in the debate. I believe that the Labour party——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: There will be plenty of opportunitiy for my hon. Friends and other hon. Members to make their contributions, and I shall reply later.

The Labour party seeks to perpetuate British Rail exactly as it is now. That is a fundamental difference, and that is why I cannot accept the amendments.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: Yes.

Mr. Snape: There are Opposition Members who want to speak.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the difficulty in his argument is that, both under our national laws and under European Community rules and regulations, SNCF could perfectly legally establish a genuinely private public limited company in Britain—10 per cent. of which would be owned by SNCF, or whatever —which would be able to bid on that basis? Theoretically, could not such a company win all the franchises?

Mr. MacGregor: If SNCF decided to take a 10 per cent. stake in a company that made a bid, it would have to be clear that no state aid was involved in its contribution. Then the company would be able to bid. Presumably such a consortium would involve many United Kingdom participants, including some managers and employees attempting a buy-out. It would be for the franchising director to decide whether such a bid produced the best value for money.

Mr. Snape *rose*——

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I am grateful to the Secretary of State; I presume that he is giving way to me.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May we be clear? Has the right hon. Gentleman concluded his speech, or is he giving way?

Mr. MacGregor: I have finished.

Mr. Snape: We are all left thoroughly confused, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wanted to ask the right hon. Gentleman a question, having watched him bog himself down in that way—it had nothing to do with the French, although I appreciate the dilemma in which questions from his hon. Friends place him.

It seems a strange proposition to say that when it comes to buy-outs managers still within BR will not be allowed to make a bid because their bid would be lower than it would be if those same managers were to mortgage their homes and attempt a management buy-out. I realise that I am no great intellectual in such matters, but I find the Secretary of State's proposition hard to accept intellectually. I should be grateful if he would enlarge on it when he sums up. He does not have a reputation as one of the great ideologues in the Government; he is known more as a number cruncher. I do not know whether he regards that as a compliment or an insult, but when he gives us all that stuff about a monolithic nationalised industry, and talks about the public sector in a derogatory way——

Mr. MacGregor *Indicated dissent.*

Mr. Snape: That is what the right hon. Gentleman said. Those were the reasons behind his refusal to allow British Rail to bid for any franchises. It is a disgraceful insult to hundreds of thousands of people—managers as well as rank-and-file railway workers—who have spent many years working in the public sector for fairly low pay. Many of the managers have earned lower rates of pay then they might have been able to earn in the private sector. They did so because they felt that there was some public service ethos in running the railway system. For them to be written off and to be described as being part of a monolithic, nationalised industry does the right hon. Gentleman no credit. It is a totally inaccurate way in which to describe the diligent efforts of many thousands of people, including my own father who spent most of his working life on the railway system under both private and public ownership. He did not notice any dramatic change to a monolithic industry. It seems that Conservative central office may be writing the right hon. Gentleman's briefs in this debate because he has trotted out philosophical nonsense as a justification of a policy that I find incredible.

I do not know whether Conservative Members understand the basis on which railway franchises are to be allocated. I noticed some puzzled looks. The fact that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), among others, had a few things to say and thoroughly confused the Secretary of State suggests that the right hon. Gentleman should go back to the drawing board.

Surely it is a fundamental tenet of Conservative faith that the public sector should bid against the private sector. After all, as we have heard from the Secretary of State, Conservatives believe that the private sector is inherently more efficient. What are they so frightened of? The fact that those with the greatest experience of running the railway industry will be excluded on the spurious ground that they will undercut the private sector will not benefit the consumer, the passenger or the freight user in the long term, even if it were true. There is not a shred of evidence that it is true. To exclude the very people with the experience of running the railway industry goes to show how daft the whole Bill is.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): Surely the whole point of my right hon. Friend's remarks is that the people with experience will not be excluded. They will be encouraged to participate in management-employee buy-outs. What will be excluded will be the monolithic structure. I am glad that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has just mentioned the most

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

important people—the passengers. What we are trying to do in the Bill is to improve customer service. The people who most matter on the railways are the passengers. The railways are not run for the benefit of the employees. To listen to most Opposition Members, one would think that it was only the employees who mattered.

Mr. Snape: The future of a once-great industry should not be decided on the basis of the personal ambitions of a callow youth from Blackpool. We are talking about the dismemberment of a railway industry. Let the hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) think of this. We shall deal with the passengers and the benefits in a moment. Who exactly among the managers who run the railway now will run the railway while all this bureaucratic claptrap is being put together? Does the hon. Gentleman know, as he rushes to defend his own silly piece of legislation, no doubt in the hope of preferment in the future?

The hon. Gentleman is the secretary of the all-party railways group. For him to defend this legislation suggests that at the group's annual general meeting we should have a serious look at his qualifications for the job. My goodness, the sooner he is an Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and therefore gagged and prevented from taking part in these debates, the sooner we shall have a bit of common sense brought into them.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Come on. That is a bit much.

Mr. Snape: Perhaps I over-promote the hon. Member for Blackpool, South.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Northern Ireland?

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend says Northern Ireland——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. What has this got to do with the new clause and the amendments under consideration?

Mr. Snape: It has a great deal to do with the fact that those of us who know something about the railway object to the claptrap to which we have had to listen this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, if you can contain the hon. Member for Blackpool, South and prevent him from making long interventions, I shall do my best to confine my remarks to the new clause——

Madame Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not enter into bargaining propositions with hon. Members.

Mr. Snape: That is very wise, if I may say so, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Another fallacy peddled by the Secretary of State is that British Rail is the monopoly provider of public services. Where is the monopoly in the railway system? What is the monopoly against internal air services? We have privatised long-distance coach services. We in the United Kingdom are addicted to the company car. Where is the monopoly? This monopoly exists only in the minds of some of the sillier Conservative Members——

Mr. MacGregor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: I realise that I may have provoked the right hon. Gentleman into rising to his feet by saying that. I hope that this will be a very short intervention.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman has pointed to other methods of transport in which there is competition within and competition between them. There is competition between all of them and within them in the private sector. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the railways should be the main area of transport that can be run only by a single organisation and in the public sector?

5.45 pm

Mr. Snape: I do not think that. That is not what the Bill is about. The Opposition have acknowledged that there is a place for the private sector in the provision of transport. Of course, we have admitted that the state cannot possibly provide everything. The new clause and associated amendments are about giving British Rail under its current structure the opportunity to demonstrate that it can compete against the private sector on, to use an overworked phrase, a level playing field. There is nothing ideological about that. If the right hon. Gentleman is so sure of his facts, he has nothing to worry about because the private sector will win hands down anyway. To avoid facing the fact that there may be managers within the public sector who are every bit as well qualified, if not more so, than their private sector counterparts to make these bids, the right hon. Gentleman has to invent stories about them deliberately undercutting the private sector to preserve their own empires. There is not a shred of evidence for that.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to 30 managers who had already expressed——

Mr. MacGregor: Thirty-five.

Mr. Snape: Thirty five? The figure has gone up already. A note has obviously come from the Box. One of the 35 managers who have expressed an interest wrote to me recently. He told me that he wrote to the Secretary of State saying that he thought that his plans to dismember the railway industry were extremely damaging and that they would have grave long-term consequences for the economy. He said that he received a letter back thanking him for his interest and enclosing all the documents necessary for him to make an application for one of the franchises. If the other 34 managers are like that, the right hon. Gentleman's case becomes even more questionable. From listening to him, I believe that it is pretty questionable already.

Where are the parameters against which the bids are to be measured? There is none if British Rail management are to be excluded from the whole process. The right hon. Gentleman said that the regulator will, of course, look at how much the service costs under the existing British Rail network and will measure the quality of the bids against that cost. That presupposes that one can break up a national railway industry financially into 25 nice little compartments and that one can say that if running trains within one twenty fifth of the railway costs £X million, the franchise should be around £X million. I am not sure how well qualified the right hon. Gentleman is in accountancy. Again, it will be, to say the least, a fairly elastic process if that is how it will be done.

We all know that the franchising director will accept the lowest bid for a particular group of services. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister for Public Transport, the faithful Sancho, will agree at least on that.

Let us suppose that there was a bid of £20 million for a hypothetical group of services in the west midlands. Let us suppose that the existing BR managers, whether they had mortgaged their homes or not and whether they had decided to be capitalists rather than railway workers or not, said that instead of a £20 million bid for a half-hour service, they would bid £22 million for a 20-minute service. With their knowledge of the railway industry, they could perhaps do that with one extra unit and with two extra crews. Such a bid would be disqualified under the Bill.

Mr. MacGregor *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Snape: The Secretary of State shakes his head. He has already said that if the bid came from within the public sector, it would be disqualified. To throw away all that expertise purely for ideological purposes is nonsense.

I appeal to Conservative Members, many of whom are here today, who have taken an interest in railway matters over the years to tell the Secretary of State that once again he has got it wrong. Not everyone—managers, employees or people in the salaried or wages grades—in the railway industry believes in what the Secretary of State calls an inefficient monolithic organisation. Many believe in the future of the industry to which they have given their lives. It is totally nonsensical and unfair to exclude those railway men and women from the whole tendering process. For that reason, Conservative Members—at least, those who care—should support this group of amendments.

Mr. Hawkins: The concern of those whom I represent, who care about the railways as deeply as I do, is to ensure that the legislation works in practice. The importance of the new clause, and the reason why the Government are right to maintain their position that management and employee buy-out bids should be allowed but British Rail should not be allowed to bid, is that the railways should benefit from the skill and expertise of the people who understand the running of them and who can be encouraged to be involved in management-employee buy-outs. However, there should be every opportunity for customer service to be improved without the danger of the whole purpose of the Bill—to bring in private sector management and skills—being undermined. It will be undermined if, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly said, the monolithic British Rail, as it has been for so many years, is allowed to bid in its own right.

Labour Members seek to undermine the whole basis of the bid by allowing British Rail to undercut private competition. That change is unacceptable because it would ensure that all the customer complaints up and down the country about the unacceptable quality of British Rail services continue in the years ahead. We want to see an improved railway service. It is no good hon. Members such as the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) talking about ideology. We are interested in serving the public. It is not possible for Labour Members to ignore the voluble and voluminous complaints that they get, as I get, about the appallingly low quality of many British Rail services. It is simply not acceptable for them to ignore the volume of customer and passenger complaints about so many lines, which have resulted from the mismanagement of so much of British Rail over so many years.

I welcome the fact that, for the first time in a debate on rail—I have been a regular attender of such debates—the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said that he accepted that there had been both management and employee failures in British Rail. One welcomes a sinner who repenteth and a conversion on the road to Damascus, however late it is. It is to be welcomed that at long last there is some acceptance on the part of Labour Members that there have been many things wrong with British Rail in the past. That is why it is so extraordinary that they are still arguing that British Rail should be allowed to bid. That would undermine the whole purpose of what the Government are doing, which is to bring in the fresh air of private sector management to improve customer service. Labour Members will be taken seriously on this issue only when they start talking about the volume of customer and passenger complaints.

I shall refer to a point made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). She suggested that the Government's response to new clauses tabled this afternoon was the result of pressure from an organisation called Save Our Railways. I have examined carefully the heavily hyped media launch of a Save Our Railways press release issued yesterday, which talks about a number of Conservative Members, including me, and the reaction of the public—in the view of Save Our Railways—in those Conservative seats. When one looks carefully at the press release—clearly, those members of the media who concentrated on it heavily in the past 24 hours did not look at it carefully enough—it makes it clear that 5,300 people in 53 seats were surveyed. The briefest acquaintance with statistics would show that that means that precisely 100 people in each seat were surveyed. That is hardly a statistically significant sample.

The Save Our Railways survey referred to the feelings of a percentage of the people in each Conservative seat. The figures of 79 per cent. and 6 per cent. suggest that a large number of people were surveyed. However, if only 100 people in each seat were surveyed on their views of the various clauses, the figures of 6 per cent. and 9 per cent. show that only six people and nine people respectively were surveyed.

Before the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate readily adopts a rail union-funded campaign, which claims to be all-party on the basis only that a single former Conservative Member, however distinguished, was involved in the launch of that campaign, she should examine the survey more carefully. When I look at the figures relating to my seat, I have the endorsement of 79 per cent.—79 of the 100 people surveyed agreed with my views on rail privatisation. That is a ringing endorsement and it is one of the reasons why, at the local elections last week, a rail union councillor was defeated and we won a seat from Labour.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Passing reference is one thing, but to expand it to an entire speech is another. The hon. Gentleman must return more closely to the new clause being debated.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I simply wanted to make the point that, despite the remarks of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, 79 per cent. of the people in my constituency who were surveyed by Save Our Railways agreed with me. That is a ringing endorsement of the Government's opposition to clauses such as new clause 24. It is one of the reasons why I support so readily my right hon. Friend's opposition to these suggestions.

Dr. Marek: It is always a tell-tale sign that, when the Secretary of State is on a weak footing, he attacks Labour Members, and he did so on this occasion. He is shaking his head—he should look at the *Official Report*. During debates on other amendments, perhaps when he was about to give way or he was sure of his ground, he did not attack Labour Members.

The Secretary of State said that the Labour party wants no change. I do not think that any Labour Member holds that view, because we all know that there are problems with the railway system in the United Kingdom—it is grossly underfunded, the rolling stock is old, the capacity to build rolling stock is in doubt unless action is taken and the system is understaffed. Frankly, one wonders how the industry ever gets a train to leave and arrive on time as it does. The staff manage to do that, despite all the handicaps under which they must work.

The Secretary of State said that Labour Members want a large monolithic organisation to continue. I cannot subscribe to that. But I subscribe to the proposition that the railway system is a network, a system and a unity of its own. Wilfully dismembering the system without producing the slightest shred of evidence that the way in which the Government intend to do it is right is not in the interests of the country or of the passengers and customers.

The Secretary of State did not mention the customers or the passengers. I agree that the hon. Member for Blackpool,South (Mr. Hawkins) eventually mentioned them, but the Government Front Benchers certainly did not. The Secretary of State should look at the *Official Report* tomorrow—and I shall do the same.

Labour Members are worried that, if the changes come about—we can make general speeches on Third Reading—customers and passengers will not be able to undertake journeys from one station to another. Will passengers and customers have the security of knowing that, if they know that they must get up early tomorrow morning to catch the 7 o'clock train to somewhere, the train will run? I admit that trains do not always run on time now, but why add the extra danger that a franchising company that has bid too much or has not produced the figures that it expected when it was first given the franchise will go bankrupt or walk away from the operation at a moment's notice?

If British Rail could bid for franchises, that would keep other franchise operators on their toes. Under the present circumstances, that would not happen. I would go a little further: I believe that there is a certain amount of dogmatic malice on the part of the Government against a nationalised industry such as British Rail and against the people who have run the service. The service has been understaffed and underfinanced. Employees have been attacked by the Government during the 10 years that I have been a Member of Parliament. The Government want to see the end of the nationalised industry and it does not matter to them how that is done. If the country has to suffer, so be it. I am afraid that that is how I look at it. That is why the Government are so keen to ensure that the new clause and amendments in this group are defeated.

6 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has tabled a new clause. I have tabled five amendments in this group. I suggest two ways in which British Rail could be brought into the operation to keep the private operators on their toes. The hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) has tabled some amendments in the group. I hope that the new clause or one of the amendments will be accepted today. Of course, we shall support the new clause tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, if he decides to press it to a vote. I should also be happy to support the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Ashford.

I am amazed at the lack of information that is sometimes given in the press. The leader in *The Independent* today is entitled "A concession to speed BR's sale." It talks about two questions and says:

> "The second of these questions is easier to answer. Far from being the leap into the dark its critics allege, private railways have yielded impressive dividends in Japan, Sweden and elsewhere."

The leader makes no further reference to Japan, Sweden or anywhere else, but it is held up as an answer that the reader of *The Independent* can accept as the editors's judgment of whether the privatisation proposals are worth anything.

We all know that in Sweden any success that has been achieved has depended crucially on Swedish railways being able to bid. It has been successful in about 79 per cent. of the bids. In many cases, it has turned loss into profit. What is wrong with that? If a national operator that is kept on its toes by private competition can turn lines from loss making into profit making in another country, why does the Secretary of State for Transport intend to prohibit that in the United Kingdom? There is only one answer to that question: it is because of dogma, malice and hatred of public service and public industry.

I wrote down a few comments that the Secretary of State made. He said that he wanted to encourage management buy-outs. There is no difficulty in understanding why he wants to do that: it is because no one else can run the railway industries. So railway managers who have been slated by the Secretary of State in the past few years will suddenly be lauded by him because they will buy out the industry. Suddenly, they have a private entrepreneurial ethos. They will be completely different creatures. It is beyond me to understand why that should be the case and why, if there are constraints on British Rail, the Secretary of State cannot remove them.

I admit that the Secretary of State is removing some constraints—for example, in freight operations. However, he could remove many of the constraints on British Rail without this dreadful Bill. If there were a referendum, I am sure that 90 per cent. of people would vote against the Bill. The Secretary of State also said that he wanted to restructure the industry into small units. If that happens, it will be more difficult for passengers to take a train from one station to another. The smaller the number of units, the more difficulty for the passenger and the customer.

The Secretary of State also said that he wanted a culture change. My thoughts immediately went to the water companies, which are now charging outrageous amounts and cutting off the supply of water from more desperate people and families than ever before. That is the culture that the Secretary of State wants to introduce. He wants to sweep away the idea of public service. That may be possible in other circumstances, but it is not possible for the major, necessary utilities or for transport systems. An integrated national railway service is certainly one of those. Therefore, it should be kept together.

If the Secretary of State were prepared to move some way, I would be prepared to accept that private capital and private interests should be brought in to keep the major provider of the network on its toes, as has happened in

Sweden. Sadly, that will not happen here. It is a great pity. The Secretary of State shows his dogmatic malice by refusing to accept any argument. For the sake of the country—and for the sake of his party, which will reap the rewards if the clause is accepted; but that is not a matter for me—I hope that there are enough Conservative Members who have not done a deal. I hope that they have not done deals. I have not been party to the negotiations and talks which have been held. I hope that Conservative Members will have sufficient integrity to vote for the new clause or one of the amendments. If they do, it is just conceivable that they can rescue an awful Bill and turn it into one that might work.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): The new clause and amendments would allow British Rail to tender for franchises. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends to resist them. At first sight, the case for allowing British Rail to tender is superficially attractive. British Rail has all the resources needed to be a successful operator. It has a world of experience and expertise. It will be a continuing operator in other spheres of the railway service.

However, the new clause and amendments would wreck the Government's purpose. They would fight off most private franchise operators for fear of unfair competition. British Rail would have disproportionate resources and much bigger muscle than any new franchise proposed operator. There is no way in which one could avoid cross-subsidisation between one set of contracts and another in a giant organisation such as British Rail.

I remind my hon. Friends who may be considering supporting the new clause or amendments that one could not persuade potential private franchisers that there would not be artificial competition in a particular bid which it was preparing and spending money on. I am well aware that assurances would be given that the system could be policed, but it could not. I wish to give the House a read-across which illustrates that it would not be possible to iron out and prevent cross-subsidisation.

I ask my hon. Friends to consider what has happened in local government. We all know that there are many examples where in-house bids have been made by local authority departments for contracts which have been put out to competitive tender. In many of those cases there have been artificially cross-subsidised bids. The Department of the Environment has issued 45 notices where it has suspected anti-competitive behaviour in the bidding. So far, it has had to issue 21 directions for either anti-competitive behaviour or failure to achieve financial targets set for the department concerned.

In other words, we have a direct read-across where, in local government, insider bids, so to speak, have resulted in artificial competition. Everybody knows that, if British Rail were allowed to bid in similar circumstances, the same artificial competition would result.

Mr. John Spellar (Warley, West): To me, 21 does not seem to be a bad average when one considers that in this country there are tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of contracts let every day under competitive tendering. To find only 21 with which something is wrong seems very good odds to me.

Sir David Mitchell: I said that, so far, there had been 21. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that it takes quite a long time for these things to work through the machinery of assessment as to whether, as suspected, an artificial bid has been put in.

Quite apart from the possibility of a deliberate intention to have cross-subsidisation, one has to consider whether British Rail would know whether there were cross-subsidisation. There are a huge number of areas in which there would be opportunity for judgment on the allocation of central overheads and servicing costs; judgment on the period of write-off and how long rolling stock will last. All these matters of judgment will have a considerable impact on the level of the bid put in by British Rail in competition with a private operator.

Mr. Dykes: Why could that not all be handled adequately by the franchising director? Why does my hon. Friend have so little confidence in that operation?

Sir David Mitchell: Simply because, in a vast organisation such as British Rail, it would be possible to hide those costs. Let me give my hon. Friend an example.

When I had the honour of serving as a Minister in the Department of Transport, British Rail came forward with a proposal to close the Settle-Carlisle railway line. We asked British Rail to give us its costs and takings. It was a monumental task to try to unravel the facts and get to basic figures upon which to form a judgment. At one point, British Rail said that it was very sorry, but it could not read the till rolls, so it could not tell us what the takings were.

Against that background, I have to say to my hon. Friend that anybody from outside who seeks to investigate whether cross-subsidisation is going on will not have a snowflake's chance in hell of getting to the bottom of it.

Mr. Harvey *rose*——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Nick Harvey—or is the hon. Gentleman giving way?

Sir David Mitchell: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend wishes to intervene.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sorry. I thought that the hon. Gentleman had concluded.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: We were very delighted that the Minister did not allow the wool to be pulled over his eyes, and the Settle-Carlisle railway survived.

Sir David Mitchell: I will close by saying that this is a very powerful argument, which I hope will be found persuasive by my hon. Friends, for supporting the Secretary of State by resisting this amendment; it would frighten away prospective franchisees from bidding, thus defeating the Secretary of State's purpose.

6.15 pm

Mr. Harvey: From time to time, I am asked to explain to people what rail privatisation is all about and how it will work. When I inform them that the only operator in the country with any experience of running the railways is the one body that is explicitly barred from taking part in the franchise competition, they move from concern and doubt to complete astonishment and incredulity. Anyone—a butcher, a baker or a candlestick maker—with no

[Mr. Harvey]

experience of running a railway, can bid; the only people who are specifically barred are the only people with any experience of running the railway.

The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), who is not present, managed, ingeniously as ever, to get the European dimension into this argument, as did the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), from a rather different perspective, perhaps. But the fact is that an operator from anywhere in Europe can bid to run these franchises, while our own national railways are debarred from doing so.

What will happen when there is only one bidder? Are the taxpayers not entitled to know that the cost of the franchise or the revenue from it will be preferable from their point of view to what British Rail could have achieved? British Rail, for all its faults, is a success story of a kind. In terms of train kilometres per staff member, it is half as good again as the European average. The Treasury support for it, at 0·14 per cent. of gross domestic product, is less than one quarter of the European average. It has more 100 mph-plus train services than virtually any other European country. The bidding process could improve this further, if the Swedish experience is anything to go by. In Sweden, the acceptance of the national railways' bids has improved the costs by 30 per cent.

The whole idea that management buy-outs are the shape of things to come is nonsense. The picture that we were originally painted by the Secretary of State was that hordes of would-be private operators were being held back at the gates, such was their enthusiasm. But, as this debate has gone on over the months and we have smoked them out and distilled a little more clearly who the people are who have expressed this interest, upon which the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has already commented, it has emerged that the Government are pinning their hopes at this stage on management buy-outs.

If these teams of managers have to take out second mortgages on their homes and stretch themselves to the limit to pay for the franchise, and then have to lease the rolling stock, where on earth will they find the money to make the investment that everybody realises the railways need to take us into the new century? They will be hamstrung in capital terms, in just the same way as management buy-outs in any other industry have been. They will not have the capital to make the investment that is needed, and they will not have any assets against which to borrow that capital.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) would want to see that the current British Rail operation could be beaten. He wanted them, as the amendment proposes, to put forward a formal tender. I have another amendment, which will come up presently, that looks at similar matters to these. In that, I call for the bidders to have to show that they can beat the projected British Rail operating costs. Supposing operators from abroad—SNCF, or whoever it might be—undercut the bids made by the private sector here: will the Government, for ideological reasons, insist on accepting an inferior bid from a British private sector bidder?

The taxpayer and the National Audit Office have the right to ask serious questions if the bids coming in cannot beat the existing British Rail operating costs, or any bids that come from a public sector, whichever public sector that might be. At a time when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is canvassing the possibility of pensioners having to pay for prescriptions, or people having to pay for hospital beds, any suggestion that these franchises should be awarded on the basis of bids that cannot undercut the current British Rail operating costs is completely unacceptable.

Why should the taxpayer have to pay for the ideology of a Government hellbent on pushing these things into the private sector? There may be a market there for the private sector to come in and run railway operations, and there may be not. It will evolve at its own speed. Surely keeping British Rail in the picture as an alternative in each and every case would enable the process to develop at its natural pace. It may be that the market will be able to take on the network over the next 20 or 30 years, but the Government are hellbent on doing it much more quickly.

Keeping British Rail in the picture, making it quote for running the service and insisting on behalf of the taxpayer that anyone else must beat that would be the best way of running the system.

Sir Keith Speed: This is an interesting debate, which goes to the heart of the Bill. When my right hon. Friend responded, he described some of my fears and those of some of my hon. Friends, but he did not deal with them all.

I have a worry, which has been echoed on both sides of the House, that management buy-outs, excellent though they are—and I entirely support them—may run into financial problems. I am sure that there will be corporate plans and very good people. As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, British Rail managers are very good, and I am sure that they would make a good fist of a management buy-out. However, if there is not the finance, and we are talking about seven-figure financing at least for most of these franchises, there could be real problems.

I heard the powerful argument by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), but perhaps I could take it a stage further. If British Rail is not allowed to bid up front at the start, his fears about frightening off management buy-outs and the private sector will have been addressed.

Let us take the London-Tilbury-Southend line, where, as I understand it—my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport will correct me if I am wrong—from 1 April next year there will be a form of shadow franchise by British Rail which will provide a yardstick against which the director of franchises will be able to judge the bids. Let us also assume that either one or two bids come in that are nothing like as good as British Rail, or no bids come in at all.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to such a possibility in reply to the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) in Standing Committee on 2 March, when he said:

"I agree with the hon. Gentleman for North Devon in what was clearly a useful debate, which helped my understanding of what might happen in 1994. The franchising director should take into account the prospective results of the lines to be franchised. At the end of the day, the franchising director will be accountable to the NAO and the PAC for achieving value for money. The bid that he accepts will have to be compared with what the public sector British Rail would have cost the taxpayer to provide a comparable

service. That is a reasonable point which I have accepted." —[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 2 March 1993; c. 506.]

So far so good; if we have either unsuitable bids or no bids, the service goes back to British Rail.

However, what is there to give the management and staff the motivation to say, "Now we have this faute de mieux, we have to make a really good fist of it, because we have seen off the private sector or they are not interested"? We also have to consider the stability of the line and the services, so that services are not cut and fares do not go rocketing up.

It is important that we at least devise a formula so that, without a shadow franchise or open bidding, where the private sector is unable or unwilling to take on a line, rather more motivation should be given to the people who made it possible—the managers and staff of that region.

If my hon. Friend could address that point in a way that will make sense, presumably through the franchise director, some of us might be more easy. Otherwise it appears to me that, whatever happens, we are being ideological, and, at the end of the day, like many hon. Members who have spoken, I want a better rail system, particularly for the passengers, and the right motivation for the staff so that they can improve still further where they have the opportunity.

In that spirit, when my hon. Friend winds up, I hope that he will be able to address not only those fears, but the real opportunities that exist for British Rail.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I start by declaring an interest: I am sponsored by the RMT union, but I speak on behalf of my constituency and all its rail employees.

York is above all else a railway town. Until some four years ago when the BREL carriageworks were privatised, British Rail was the city's biggest employer by a considerable margin. Even now, one in 12 of the work force in my constituency work in the rail industry, either for British Rail of for ABB Transportation Ltd.

The proposals in the Bill are likely to affect my constituency, my constituents and the prosperity of the city I represent as much as any other city in the country. At the moment, York is the headquarters location of two of British Rail's 10 zones. Within York itself, Regional Railways North-East employs 630 people; 400 of them are employed in the headquarters operation, so their jobs quite literally are on the line. If they are unable to make a bid to preserve their own jobs, they will have to take their luck with whoever it is, private sector operator or managment buy-out, that wins the franchise.

The other zonal headquarters is the InterCity east coast main line headquarters which employs 1,400 people. It is a highly successful railway, something I wish those on the Conservative Front Bench would acknowledge without equivocation. The Government's franchising consultation and information document pointed out that the east coast main line made a profit of £220 million in the last year for which we have figures, a major achievement for any railway, public or private, and one which should not be just written off as a public sector incompetence that needs to be replaced by private sector initiative, if one is to believe the Conservative rhetoric, at the earliest opportunity.

Despite building up the east coast main line into a highly successful and profitable service, the employees who have achieved that will not be allowed to bid for the business that they have built. The question, "Why not?" has been asked by a number of Conservative Members. The only reason that the Secretary of State can give is that he does not believe that within the public sector there is the right attitude or culture to allow for the running of a successful rail service, despite one which is a showpiece for the whole of Europe having come about under British Rail's public sector management.

If the Secretary of State believes, as I am sure he does because he would not have proposed the Bill and taken it this far if he did not, that competition will improve the performance, the quality and the cost of rail services in Britain, he should go for competition. He should let British Rail compete with allcomers. He has hardly been knocked over in the rush by private sector operators desperate to run rail services. If he does not allow British Rail to compete, in many cases he will have only one single bidder, one insider management buy-out bid. They will know that they are the only people running after the franchise, they will know that they are in a monopoly position and they will not have to put in a competitive bid. Who will have to pay the additional costs of running a service which has been won on franchise without there being any competition?

One need look only at the ITV franchise bids to see that television companies which knew that they were up against competition had to make multi-million pound bids to win the franchise, whereas one, Central Television, discovered that it was the only competitor, bid £2,000 and got the franchise. That is not in the public interest in television terms, and it will not be in the travelling public's interest in railway terms.

The staff working for British Rail, my constituents, do not want a silver spoon in their mouths. They simply want a chance to bid so that they can continue doing the jobs that they are now doing. They believe that they can provide a better service more cheaply for the passengers than can anyone else. I urge the Government to put that to the test.

6.30 pm

The Secretary of State says that British Rail cannot be allowed to bid because it might undercut the competition. In whose interest could it possibly be for a lower price not to go in for the same service? British Rail is not, as is suggested, a huge, bureaucratic, monolithic whole. It has already, with its organising for quality initiative, split itself into separate businesses that account financially for their activities in a businesslike way.

If BR puts in a bid that is too low and it loses money, it will be under the same financial pressures as any private sector bidder. It would be absurd for BR, having won a bid, to come cap in hand to the Government and expect them to respond in any way different from the way that the Government would respond to Stagecoach, Sea Containers or any other company that underbid. The company in question would have to live with the financial consquences of a bad business decision. That is what the framework of the Bill is intended to achieve, and there is no reason why it should not apply equally to private and public sector entrepreneurs.

Why allow, on the east coast main line, Richard Branson, Stagecoach, National Express Coaches or any other company to bid but not BR? The only answer seems to be that given by the Secretary of State this afternoon

—that he is afraid of public sector competition. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head in dissent. Let him test his theory in practice and allow BR to bid.

The same should apply to Regional Railways North-East. It is not a profit-making railway, but it provides a good public service at low cost. It is possible that another company could provide a better public service railway at lower cost. The Bill says that that must be tested by a competitive franchise bid. If there is to be competition, let BR put in a bid in its own right. If the Secretary of State does not allow that to happen, he will never know whether he has been sold a pup by the private sector franchise bidder which wins the franchise, because he will not have seen that bidder operate against the full range of competition.

York city council recently commissioned a firm of transport consultants, a company which has become a household name during the consideration of the Government's privatisation proposals, to undertake some work. It commissioned Steer Davies Gleave to examine the employment implications of the Government's proposals on York. It concluded that, of the present 4,700 railway employees in York, privatisation would put 2,400 BR and ABB jobs at risk and would put 1,400 additional jobs locationally at risk.

In other words, if, for example, the winner of the Regional Railways North-East franchise were to decide to locate its headquarters in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), those other jobs would not be lost to the country but would be lost to the city of York. We are speaking not simply of British Rail jobs that would be going. Netted off against the figures are the private sector jobs in York.

The proposals would have a devastating effect on the economy of York. What does the Secretary of State think that that is doing for the morale of railway employees in my constituency? The result of debarring BR from bidding to continue running railway services against the competition will, I suspect, be that the best staff will progressively leave BR and go through management buy-outs or be head-hunted by private companies. They will leave and the expertise in running rail services that resides in those people will be lost to BR.

The rump of British Rail will be left with a lower quality of leadership, management and perhaps even a lesser quality of engineering expertise. Yet the rump of British Rail will be expected to step in and save the railways when the franchise-winning private sector companies fail. British Rail will be expected to retain the expertise to save the Secretary of State's face if and when there is a private sector franchise failure. That is a possibility which the right hon. Gentleman must face.

I meet regularly senior railway managers in my constituency. I assure the Secretary of State that there is no great enthusiasm for management and employee buy-outs. If it must happen, it will happen, but it will happen with a heavy heart because the people who have built up and managed the railway services, with their headquarters in York, want to carry on running them. If they have no other option, they will take the plunge, but they feel loyal to their present company. Why should that loyalty be chucked aside? Why should the staff and the team not continue to run the railway that they have built up into the excellent east coast main line?

On the international front, the Secretary of State said that there was nothing in practice to stop SNCF or the Belgian or German railways from bidding for a British railway franchise. Perhaps when local government refuse services were privatised people did not expect French companies to come in and scoop up the business. But they did, and while the Secretary of State says that he does not expect public sector railway companies from other EC states to come in and scoop up franchises, he acknowledges that that could happen because they have the right to do so.

Where is the sense in allowing some less efficient European public sector railway operators to bid for franchises when highly efficient British Rail managers who have built up showpiece services are denied that opportunity? Indeed, if what is proposed is approved, I would expect it to be challenged in the courts under the rules of the single European market. I hope that judgment would go in favour of creating a real single market with a level playing field in which British Rail could compete against the competition on equal terms.

On that basis, if British Rail could provide a better deal for the travelling public it would win, and if it provided a poorer deal, it would lose. That is provided for in the Bill, so it is a right that should go to British public sector railway companies in the same way as it will be going to foreign public sector railway companies.

The position in Sweden bears examination because it is the only other country that has done what the British Government are proposing, namely, splitting the operation of track and infrastructure from the operation of trains. Track and infrastructure in Sweden remain in public hands, as is proposed for Britain under Railtrack, with independent operators bidding to run services. Nine out of 10 franchises have gone to Swedish state railways, but with cost savings to the public purse of about 30 per cent.

The Government have said that the whole point of privatisation is to inject competition so that there is no monopoly—one set of rail managers will have to bid against another. Whoever puts together the best deal, in terms of quality and the cost to the travelling public, will get the work. That is all we are arguing for. Let us forget the rhetoric about trying to leave British Rail unchanged. We may have differing opinions on that, but we recognise that the Bill will go through. For goodness sake, let us give the BR managers who have built the east coast main line and competitive regional services such as Regional Railways NorthEast the opportunity to carry on doing the job that they have been doing.

Mr. Dykes: I shall be brief, partly because I was not a member of the Standing Committee—a fact that I know will be greeted with enthusiasm in Scotland. Nevertheless, I have some important points to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) should be credited with our gratitude for making some helpful suggestions and with the skill with which he has tabled amendments which we enthusiastically support. I also congratulate him on the dignified and intelligent way in which he has handled the campaign in the media.

There has been a lot of interest in this subject, in part due to both a sentimental and an objective feeling about our late lamented colleague, Robert Adley, who knew so much about the railways. He was both a lover of the railways and a great expert in the nitty-gritty of the railways. The Government would be right to think meticulously about the importance of making concessions,

partly for this reason. It is not enough on its own, however, despite the eminence and skill of our former colleague, who was widely respected inside and outside the House.

The Select Committee recommendations which our late lamented colleague produced with others amounted to a masterly series of suggestions for the Department of Transport. I am sorry if I sound naive—I probably always do—but it is quite wrong that Governments should always feel obliged to regard Select Committees as pestilential nuisances to be resisted at all costs. To think in that way is absurd and immature.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has often been credited not only with being courteous to the House but with other qualities. We sympathise with him, because we suspect that he is taking this legislation through with limited enthusiasm—particularly for the part of the Bill that excludes British Rail. I and many others fear that we are still living with the tail end of the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies era, which has given us so many of these bizarre ideas.

However, in my Adjournment debate on 14 May I urged on the Government second thoughts about privatisation and deregulation—I was not referring to a bonfire of controls either. My fears in this respect were allayed by the excellent response that I received from my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who replied to the debate on behalf of the DTI by saying that the Government were not run by the Centre for Policy Studies. I was so moved by that truthful admission that I immediately realised that the Secretary of State for Transport was the ideal man to accept intelligent amendments to the legislation, including our amendment No. 57.

My right hon. Friend is entitled to be irritated, as we are, by the fact that the lead amendment in this group takes the form of an Opposition new clause. I hope, however, that that will not rule out intelligent consideration of these matters and that he will be persuaded seriously to consider accepting amendment No. 57. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford has not gone far enough with his appealing arguments that try to meet some of the Government's objections to British Rail being given an equal role in bidding for franchises.

I must declare a general interest at this point, although it is wholly different from that declared by the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley). I am a founder shareholder of a City financial and communications company which, over the years, has been involved in most of the privatisations, together with other City institutions, the Treasury and Departments of State. Although this country has effected more privatisations than any other, I believe that enough can be enough. There is no shame for a Government in saying that we have come to the end of the privatisation period and that they will think twice before making any more such proposals.

6.45 pm

These days I am only a passive shareholder in the company—I have no executive role in it—although my wife is an executive employee. The company may be involved in giving advice to the Treasury, the Government and the Department of Transport on this proposal. It is not a privatisation in the conventional sense, and for that we are grateful. It aims to bring in franchising and to grant certain companies the franchises in question. That being so, I find it illogical and offensive that British Rail should be excluded. The illogicality of the situation has emerged in our debate, and I believe that BR must be reincluded.

Perhaps we could go for a compromise mechanism. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford mentioned the problem of the motivation of BR management and employees if they are left in charge of some lines, areas or routes. British Rail would not necessarily bid on the same basis as management/employee buy-outs, and such employee buy-outs too must also be considered, and as private applicants. We would welcome them. There is general agreement about that. British Rail, however, should be allowed to be a bidder on the same basis as everyone else, bearing in mind the tremendous improvements that it has made in its operations and management, despite having been underfunded for years by a malevolent and mean Treasury. *[Interruption.]* I have said that often enough in the past; it is hardly a new utterance. If British Rail were permitted to bid as part of a segmented approach—its regions or local departments, as representing BR, might be entitled to bid—that might be one way around the difficulty.

In a recent article in "The House Magazine" I mentioned the late lamented Member for Christchurch, and what I had to say bears repetition. I said that Robert Adley and his Committee colleagues

"had already begun in the form of sensible advice to the Government on BR legislation. How nice it would be if just for once a Government could be seen to be really listening to the sagacious counsel that can come from select committees, instead of always resisting them".

Members of the Select Committee and Opposition Members, if they were all obliged, however reluctantly, to accept this legislation, as amended in Committee and on Report, would probably agree that the single most important area in which the Government's mind had to be changed was this one: the exclusion of British Rail. I hope that my right hon. Friend can bring himself to reverse that tonight, perhaps by allowing localised components of British Rail, not British Rail as a whole, to bid. If he can, he will generate enormous gratitude on both sides of the House. He will not lose face; this is the new era of moderate conservatism, and a change of mind would fit in well with the return to Cabinet government and a listening Government. I hope that he will meet some of the legitimate objections that have been expressed by Conservative Members.

Mr. MacGregor: I will reply briefly to some of the points, because I know that we have a great deal more to do tonight.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape)—who is not in the Chamber—accused me of basing my opinion of culture changes on some ideological material from Conservative central office. That is not the case. It is based on talking to a great many business men and people who have been through the process of changing from the nationalised industries to the disciplines of the marketplace in the private sector. Time after time, I have met representatives of companies and organisations—PowerGen, National Power, British Airways, BAA and Eastern Electricity, to name but a few, and many representatives from the transport world such as long-distance coach companies—and they have told me that they have seen the benefits very clearly. It is one of the crucial reasons why we believe that the structure that we are proposing for British Rail will secure better services for

[Mr. MacGregor]

passengers and freight customers. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) and I have talked through these matters and he has a very good understanding of them. Like my hon. Friend, I am not taking an ideological approach, in a political sense. What I am seeking is a system that will provide better services and better opportunities for staff.

Taking my hon. Friend's example of the London-Tilbury-Southend line, he is right that the starting point will be that a shadow franchise will demonstrate the track record and financial results of British Rail's current operations. Many Opposition Members tend to think that the only way to improve the railways is to pour in huge amounts of taxpayers' money. The London-Tilbury-Southend line is a good example of where better management is already yielding better services. With the extra investment that has recently been agreed, it will be able to build on that. My hon. Friend is right: it is on the basis of an operating record under the shadow franchise that bids can be judged. That will be the yardstick.

Let us take a hypothetical example and assume that the franchising director concludes—this may well not be the case—that the bids that he has received from the private sector do not give good value for money compared with the operating performance of London-Tilbury-Southend. He may decide not to grant a contract to any franchisee. It may also be that the management have decided not to bid for a management-employee buy-out at that time, for a number of reasons, but would like to do so in the future when they think that they might be able to make a better bid. My hon. Friend is right in identifying as one of the difficulties the possible demotivation of the existing management if they felt that another bid from someone else could come through within three months. I think that we are in a dynamic situation and that there will be all sorts of different circumstances in the franchises as we gradually move them around the country.

There has been some misinterpretation in the press of my announcement yesterday. I want to make it clear, yet again, that, although we have announced all 25 potential franchises, we have also said that these will be gradually undertaken. This is a gradual process of franchising, as I made clear in the debate yesterday.

I certainly do not wish to set a condition meaning that, for some time in the future, management and employees in, say, the London-Tilbury-Southend line could not bid for a management-employee buy-out, which might well be what they really wanted to do. I do not think that a clause or amendment could be constructed to deal specifically with my hon. Friend's point, but I accept it nevertheless: motivation for existing management and the stability of the operation are both very important in circumstances such as those that he described.

My hon. Friend has raised the point in discussions with me and I have discussed it with my special adviser on franchising, who I hope will become the franchising director. He entirely agrees with my hon. Friend that this is an important point for him to take into account. I suggest that I give the franchising director guidance and instructions under clause 5, placing weight on the need to ensure motivation for existing management and the stability of the operation. I do not want to be stuck with the specific wording; obviously, we shall have to consider the wording very carefully. I assure my hon. Friend, however, that we shall produce a second draft of the guidance and instructions before the end of our parliamentary debates.

Let me tell my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) that, in my experience, the findings of Select Committees are not always resisted. If I am convinced that someone else has had a good idea, I will certainly take it on board. If my hon. Friend looks at the many recommendations in the Select Committee report, he will see that about four fifths of them have been accepted by the Government or, indeed, were met before final publication of the report. Of course, we disagree with some of them: the crucial one relates to vertical integration. I cannot go into it now, but there are good arguments on both sides.

We have accepted many of the Select Committee's recommendations. Yesterday, for instance, I based my remarks about the remaining franchises on exactly the approach that it had recommended. In paragraph 419, the Committee expressed the following view on the issue that we are now debating:

> "There is a case for allowing BR, as well as individual groups of managers, to bid for franchises."

I have explained why I cannot accept that case. However, the report continues:

> "At the least we recommend that the level of subsidy required by BR to operate a particular service should be weighed against any other franchise bids received."

We have made it clear that that will be—in the words of my hon. Friend—a yardstick.

My hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins) and for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) made telling and powerful speeches. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst), who was a member of the Select Committee and was very much involved in our discussions, wanted to be present. I am sure that he would have made similar points about, for example, unfair competition, the disproportionate resources that British Rail would have and the huge disincentive for other bidders.

Mr. Dykes: I would be grateful—as, I am sure, would others—if my right hon. Friend would answer the point about British Rail being allowed to bid, not as a single national organisation but on a localised structural basis.

Mr. MacGregor: I have explained why I cannot accept bids from British Rail as a single national organisation and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West explained tellingly how difficult it would be to accept them on any other basis. I prefer to follow the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford.

We are talking about encouraging existing employees —management and staff—to participate in the bidding process. We are encouraging them to take the opportunity to continue to do the job. Of course, the new franchisees, having been selected, would want to employ and give new opportunities to many employees and of course the provisions of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 will apply. We are encouraging existing management-employee buy-outs. We want British Rail to establish an operating record against which bids should be judged: that means putting it to the test. We want to improve passenger services through a new structure—and that is what the Opposition are trying to prevent.

Mr. Wilson: In the previous debate the Secretary of State gave something. We might disagree about how much he gave and whether it justified the withdrawal of the Tory new clause, but I do not quibble about what Tory Members did. In this case it is much more clear-cut because the Secretary of State has given nothing. Therefore, the position is clear for those who put their names to the new clause and, I should have thought, also for those who signed the report of the Select Committee, chaired by our late lamented colleague.

In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) about the irritation of voting on a new clause tabled by the Opposition rather than an amendment tabled by Tory Members, we would have been happy if the vote had been on a Government new clause, but to ensure that there was a debate and that the issue was voted on, we tabled a new clause which in substance, content and spirit is no different from amendments tabled by Tory Members.

7 pm

As to the point about other state railways being allowed to bid, the Secretary of State blustered over it but essentially could not deny it. He is legislating for circumstances in which the French state railway, the Belgian state railway and the Irish state railway will be able to operate services in Britain. The only European state railway which will not be able to tender for the services is the British state railway. I find it very odd that a Secretary of State in a United Kingdom Government should legislate in that way.

If the French state railway starts to run services into the heart of rural England, I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrow, East at least will join me in the hope that points such as Stafford and Southend will be included in the network. What an extraordinary thing for a British Government to legislate for. They cannot legislate against other state railways, but they are prepared to do so against their own, out of prejudice and spite.

We went to the heart of the debate when the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) stood up in genuine puzzlement and said that he could not understand why it should be possible for private companies to bid or for management buy-outs to take place, yet British Rail is not to be allowed to bid as an entity. The classic exercise in prevarication from the Secretary of State, as he shuffled around for his notes to find out how that was to be explained, told us more than anything he said.

Eventually the right hon. Gentleman came up with two explanations: in summary, first, British Rail would be the lowest bidder and, secondly, the City would be deterred. Those are not convincing explanations. The Government want competition. Having gone through the exercise, if British Rail was the lowest bidder, would not that be a plus? Having regard to what the Government want to do, would not it be an advantage? British Rail would have to compete. It would have to prove itself the most competent and cheapest operator. The disciplines of competition would be imposed upon it and passengers would get the best possible service from among the bidders. What is wrong with that in the opinion of the Tory party, never mind the Opposition? Yet that option is to be closed, specifically because it would result in the terrible evil of British Rail winning by being the cheapest and most efficient.

The second reason was that the City would be deterred from investing in potential buy-outs because it would be constrained by the fact that there would be a cheaper bidder. In other words, the calculations of investors will not be based on the market or on competition, but on what they can get away with bidding for franchises in the absence of the most competitive alternative bidder. What a set of criteria on which to dispose of national assets.

As to the alibi on management buy-outs, every Opposition Member agrees that if privatisation is to go ahead there should be attempts at management buy-outs. There is very little enthusiasm for them, but in many places the second last thing that people who have given their lives to the service of the railway want to see is the legislation going ahead. The last thing they want is that people with no previous connection with the railway and no experience of it should walk past them to take over what they have built up and their jobs.

Inevitably, management buy-outs will be prepared and expressions of interest will be screwed out of managers in every area. The idea that there is a positive will for management buy-outs throughout the BR network is a fallacy. The Conservative party brief to its members told them to say that 30 management buy-outs bids were in course of preparation. They have had to retreat from that because it is untrue. The figure of 30 applies not to bids in preparation, for which the figure is zero, but to expressions of interest, which includes even that of Brian Scott in Great Western, who said specifically that he would not be interested unless there was vertical franchising. Having scraped together all the expressions of interest, the Conservative party misrepresented them as bids in course of preparation.

There are three essential reasons why the management buy-out argument fails. The first is out of a sense of duty which should be felt on the Tory side to people who have worked within the public sector industry. Why, in order to participate in the brave new future, should managers, perhaps with young families and many responsibilities, have to mortgage their homes and get into debt? Why cannot they continue to act through the public service provided by British Rail?

The second argument is that buy-outs are not for ever. Indeed, they can last for only a short time before being bought out again, so that we end up with straightforward privatisation. Many analogies have been drawn with the bus industry. I can quote a recent one in Scotland where Citylink bus company, the main arterial operator, which was the product of a management buy-out two and a half years ago for a bargain basement price, has been sold to a private operator to produce a monopoly. So in many cases management buy-outs do not last. They are bought out and become part of the private sector, with the result that many people who were involved originally and who gave their lives to the service are no longer involved. That is another argument against the management buy-out alibi.

Thirdly, management buy-outs would lead to fragmentation of railways. While privatisation is a daft policy, fragmentation is a dangerous and potentially destructive one. The Government's determination to break up an integrated network into dozens of companies, to separate track from operators and then to separate those who are operating on the track, is the truly destructive aspect of the legislation. It is not addressed through the so-called solution of management buy-outs.

If French and Belgian railways can bid, let us speak for Britain. British Rail should be allowed to bid because it is likely to be the lowest bidder and the most experienced and efficient operator. If anything in Tory philosophy runs counter to that, it will be expressed in the Division Lobby. Let us put Britain first and let us support the right of British Rail to bid. Let us prevent the fragmentation of the railways on the basis of political dogma, with services being run by people who have no experience or qualifications to do the job.

My hon. Friends and I, as well as some Tory Members, are fighting for the railways. If the legislation is passed and things go wrong, it is not to the Opposition alone that Tory Members will have to answer but to their constituents who, in overwhelming numbers, are opposed to and concerned about the destruction of British Rail for ideological reasons. Let the Government give us investment in the railways rather than ideology. That is the message from the country which should be listened to now and reflected in the Division Lobby.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 309.

Division No. 281] **[7.8 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'ds E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Kilfoyle and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ruclif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*

Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Sir John Stanley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yesterday, the House had an extended debate on fares in relation to amendment No. 237. Winding up, my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"The amendment was selected relatively late. I assure him that, before we come to amendments Nos. 239 and 244, which relate to much the same issues, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will reflect on the debate. We look forward to answering the points and, I hope, satisfying our right hon. and hon. Friends tomorrow with appropriate assurances."—[*Official Report*, 24 May 1993; Vol. 225, c. 678.]

I should be grateful if you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would confirm that it will be open to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, in the context of the debate on amendment No. 109, to fulfil the assurance that he gave yesterday and to respond with the outcome of the considerations that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to amendment No. 237.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The Minister can certainly address the broad issues involved.

Clause 2

RAIL USERS' CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I beg to move amendment No. 109, in page 2, line 28, leave out

'for the purposes of this Part'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 239, in clause 64, page 69, leave out lines 33 to 41.

No. 240, in page 69, line 41, at end insert 'or—

(iii) the differential between the rates at which different classes of fare are charged for comparable services operated by the franchisee or franchise operator, and the Board;'.

No. 241, in page 69, line 41, at end insert 'or—

(iii) the differential between the average level of fares charged by the Board or any subsidiary of the Board for any class or description of passenger or in respect of any class or description of passenger service and the average level of equivalent fares charged under franchise agreements'.

No. 242, in clause 65, page 71, leave out lines 12 to 20.

No. 243, in page 71, line 20, at end insert 'or-

(iii) the differential between the rates at which different classes of fare are charged for comparable services operated by the franchisee or franchise operator, and the Board';'.

No. 244, in page 71, line 20, at end insert 'or-

(iii) the different between the average level of fares charged by the Board or any subsidiary of the Board for any class or description of passenger or in respect of any class or description of passenger service and the average level of equivalent fares charged under franchise agreements'.

Mr. Freeman: This is a technical amendment, but grouped with it are others relating to important issues to which, with the leave of the House, I hope to respond later.

Amendment No. 109 is the only Government amendment in the group, and it is required to extend the role of the consultative committees beyond part I. The need for it is predicated on amendments made in Committee, to widen and emphasise the committees' important role.

The amendment will permit committees to discharge duties—for example, under section 56 of the Transport Act 1962 in respect of local railways such as the Tyne and Wear metro and the Manchester metro link. I am sure that the amendment has the broad agreement of both sides of the House, but I shall seek to say more later in response to points that I anticipate from my right hon. and hon. Friends.

I will first respond specifically to issues that were raised in relation to amendment No. 237. You said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that broad comments would be in order. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I considered that amendment, which was selected for debate but not for a vote. We assure the House, and specifically my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and others of our right hon. and hon. Friends who associated themselves with his remarks, that we accept their arguments.

We undertake to reflect further on them and to bring forward an appropriate amendment in another place, which can be debated there and then return to this Chamber as a Lords amendment.

That amendment should embody four principles. First, a duty should be imposed on the franchise director in respect of fares, and clause 5 is probably the most appropriate point for that to be introduced.

Secondly, there should also be a duty in relation to fares exercised through the franchising agreement. My right hon. Friend understands that some services will run outwith the franchising arrangements, but, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced, it is the intention that existing railway services throughout Great Britain will be subject to franchises. Therefore, the agreements into which the franchising director will enter will cover all services.

Thirdly, that duty should cover not just services where there is a monopoly but also cases in which it is not possible to identify services as purely monopolistic. My right hon. Friend and I understand concerns that, even with those services subject to full competitive pressures, such as some InterCity services, the operator—perhaps unwisely and incorrectly—will seek to increase fares, and that would cause concern to passengers. In a competitive market, the operator would undoubtedly lose passengers. However, I confirm that third principle.

Finally, as to the criteria that the franchising director should use in including in agreements provisions relating to fares, we accept that the director himself should be under an obligation to care for the interests of passengers, using his own judgment of what is a reasonable level of fares.

I may be able to respond later in the debate particularly to amendments that are not in the Government's name but to which I anticipate I will be able to respond positively and favourably.

I repeat the assurance that we will return to the point with an amendment in another place that I hope will meet the four criteria to which reference was made in the debate. Although the amendment is not actually for debate, I hope that that will satisfy my right hon. and hon. Friends.

7.30 pm

Mr. Wilson: We have listened with interest to the Minister's comments. This is the third debate today in which Ministers have responded to amendments moved not only by Labour Members but by Conservative Members.

Although the Bill's structures are being left intact—Labour believes that the Bill is fundamentally flawed and that it will come to grief in the end—the statements that the Minister of State and the Secretary of State have made today, if acted on, will have a major effect.

The franchising director is being given extraordinary powers. We heard earlier that the franchising director will impose conditions for concessionary fares. That enormous responsibility is being transferred to the franchising director. We now hear—I make no complaint about it, but welcome it—that the franchising director will have the power to regulate fares on both franchised and non-franchised services.

That is all very well if it is loosely in line with what the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) was saying last night or with the objections of other Conservative Members, including the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), but it leaves the question of where the money will come from. That is the next stage of the debate. The debate does not end when the legislation is enacted.

If we can take at face value the assurances that are being given—that fares will be controlled by the franchising director and that the existing structure of concessions for at least the three named categories will be imposed by the franchising director—we are certainly not talking about a free market in railways or market forces. We are talking about a substantially more regulated railway than we have at present. I do not complain about that, but it strikes me as odd logic in Tory policy, as constrained by the understandable objections of Conservative Members.

Whether it will work out like that is another question. The crunch will come—perhaps in 1995—when a franchisee says, "It's impossible. We entered this with good will, but the subsidy is not high enough. We need to raise fares by 25 per cent. to get a reasonable return." According to the Minister—I was pleased to hear it—the franchising director's duty will be to say, "No, you're not. You will increase fares by what I allow." Presumably he will take account of what the Government tell him, some of the political pressures prevailing at the time and a range of other circumstances.

I assure Ministers that every Opposition Member will ensure that the franchising director is known to the public as a creature of Government and not an independent spirit. The franchising director will have to take tough decisions. He will have to tell franchisees, "Yes, you can increase fares by 25 per cent.", in which case the opprobrium will fall on Ministers; or, "The rate of inflation is 5 per cent. so you are getting only 7·5 or 10 per cent."

At that point, the franchisee will say, "If I am getting only 10 per cent., I still cannot make ends meet, so I shall withdraw X number of services, and what are you going to do about that, Mr. Franchising Director?" Such situations will arise sooner rather than later.

It has been explained to the Minister time and again, primarily in the context of the Department of Transport's own document on bus privatisation in the mid-1980s, that the Government cannot create monopolies under a franchise system and have any realistic hope of controlling them. What the Government set out to do was to create private monopolies under the guise of franchises, and not control them.

For months in Committee and throughout our debates, we have heard that there will be no need to control franchisees because the invisible hand of the market will work wondrously for the Government. It has been argued that concessionary schemes or fares and a control mechanism for fares are not necessary, because the market will sort it all out.

Today, we have witnessed a spectacular reversal in Government policy, because such matters will now be controlled not by the market but by the franchising director. That is the beginning of the Government's troubles rather than the end of them. They have had to yield to the proper concerns of Conservative Members, which Opposition Members have been expressing for months.

The important point is that the Government have yielded. We now have it in black and white, and it will be written into the regulations and the record of our debates, that the franchising director will be responsible for functions and for setting fares.

The franchising director is the creature of Government. When the inevitable conflict arises between franchisee and franchising director, and the franchising director is faced either with the possibility of losing the franchisee or yielding to his demands, we shall return to this debate and say, "It is not the market's fault; it is not the franchising director's fault; it is not the franchisees' fault; it is the fault of the people who put all this in place to start with."

Sir John Stanley: I begin by warmly welcoming the significant policy statement that my hon. Friend the Minister of State made at the beginning of the debate. He said for the first time in our proceedings on the Bill that the Government have accepted the principle of reasonableness in relation to fares and franchised routes and that it should be written into the legislation.

Secondly, the Government have accepted—again, for the first time in our proceedings—that the franchising director should be responsible for fares. Thirdly, they have accepted the important point that the franchising director's duty on fares should apply not merely to the so-called monopoly routes but to routes generally—in other words, right across the country.

That represents three very significant policy shifts, which I welcome, but all three points were embodied in amendment No. 237, which my hon. Friends and I tabled and which was debated yesterday. The slightly niggling, gnawing question at the back of my mind is the revised wording of amendment No. 237 that my hon. Friend the Minister will propose. I have much faith in my hon. Friend

[Sir John Stanley]

and I wait with interest to see what he proposes. I earnestly hope that the amendment will not water down the clear impression that he has given the House today about the important policy points that he has now accepted.

Mr. Prescott: It was indeed a significant statement by the Minister of State because it finally did away with the pretence that the market will apply. Previously, supply and demand determined price, but now the franchising will do so. The hon. Member is concerned about reasonableness, so does he believe that, if the franchise operator is not prepared to work at a price because he believes that he cannot make the required profit, it is reasonable to expect good old British Rail to operate at the same price?

Sir John Stanley: I am speaking to the amendment in relation to fares, but my answer to the hon. Gentleman is that British Rail is working on a different financial basis. Routes that remain in British Rail's hands will have access to Government subsidy, which may not be the case for franchised routes.

I deal now with this group of amendments, in particular the four tabled by my colleagues and I—Nos. 239, 241, 242 and 244. It may be helpful if I explain that the four amendments have a single common purpose and then why we have tabled four. The common purpose is to ensure that the new statutory bodies created under the legislation to look after the interests of the consumer have the ability to deal with the central issue of fares.

The four amendments should be regarded as two pairs —Nos. 239 and 242 should be taken together. Amendment No. 239 deals with the central committee and No. 242 with the regional committee. They would remove any inhibition or limitation on the ability of the consultative committees to consider fares. The second pair of amendments—Nos. 241 and 244—are slightly more narrowly drawn and would enable the consultative committees, both central and regional, to consider the differential between the level of fares on franchised and non-franchised routes.

The second pair was tabled against the possibility that the first pair was not selected because the first pair was debated in Committee and therefore risked not being selected. As both pairs have been selected, I shall speak to amendments Nos. 239 and 242, the first pair, which would provide much the best arrangements for consumers and ensure that nothing in the Bill could in any way constrain the ability of the consultative committees to consider fares.

We are debating this policy from what I regard as an eccentric start in the initial print of the Bill. The Bill sweeps away all existing consultative committees and replaces them with major new committees—the national body with the singularly grandiloquent title of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee, and its nine satellites, the regional consultative committees. They are the bodies, above all others, to which the consumers will have to look to safeguard their interests in all aspects of rail travel.

I find it extraordinary that, the new bodies having been created, they are debarred from involvement in the issue that is possibly of most concern to consumers or the rail travelling public—the level of fares. On Second Reading I drew attention to clause 65(2) which achieves that. It states:

"Nothing in subsection (1) above shall entitle a consultative committee to investigate any matter relating to . . . the charges made for any service or for the use of any railway facility".

We are left in the extraordinary position of creating new bodies to look after consumers' interests, but debarring them by law from having any involvement in the scrutiny of fares.

To their credit, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister of State have gone some way to modify the situation. They did so in Committee and have now conceded that the consultative bodies should have some involvement in fares. However, although the principle is conceded in the Bill, it has not been conceded in relation to all fares. The consultative bodies can examine special and discounted fares, but not the generality of fares. We are faced with the absurd situation in which it is possible for the committees to examine fares for the disabled but not the able bodied, and fares for the very old or the very young but not the middle aged, and here I declare an interest. The types of fares that can be considered are divided into fish and fowl—some can be considered and some cannot.

The purpose of amendments No. 239 and 242 is simple. They would sweep away the remaining prohibition and enable the important consumer protection bodies to consider the generality of fares. I urge my right hon. Friend and the Minister of State to accept them. My right hon. Friend has conceded the principle and I hope that he will now be bold and brave, accept the logic of what happened in Committee and allow the consultative bodies to examine all fares without limitation.

7.45 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): It is pleasant on what is only my second speech in the House to be able to agree with much of what has been said by Conservative Members. I believe that this group of amendments goes to the heart of privatisation. To my mind, whether or not one agrees with it, privatisation passes power from the community to the shareholder. Some of us will support that and some will not but, whatever we think, when power is passed from the community to the shareholder, it is crucial that the watchdogs that look after community interests should be strengthened, not weakened. I believe that that is why the amendments have been tabled.

There are two main failings in the suggestions about the way in which the consultative committees will work. As I understand it, the consultative committees can comment on such vital issues as whether the snow in winter is or is not of the right sort for the rail service, but they cannot comment on issues that most users might think rather more important. I am thinking in particular of fares, which have already been mentioned, and the possible cutting of services.

I shall deal first with the cutting of services and wish to comment in particular on the fact that one of the main worries in my community is that the fast, long-distance trains running between London and the west country, some of which currently stop in our community, may not do so in the future. The franchisees may decide that it is more profitable to run such trains straight through to the west country without stopping at stations such as Reading, Thatcham and Newbury. Clearly, that would be to the disadvantage of the people whom I have come here to represent, and I have no doubt that the same problems

face other communities. It is therefore important that the consultative committee that will look after the interests of my constituents and others has the opportunity to comment and to ensure, if possible, that such cuts do not happen.

The second issue of prime importance is the level of fares. If there is no train at all, one cannot use the rail service, but, if the train is too expensive, one may also not be able to use the rail service. Therefore, the question of fares is crucial to all rail users. Clearly, the user representatives should be able to comment on the comparisons between charges made by various franchisees and British Rail for the same service. That is why my colleagues have tabled amendments Nos. 240 and 243, and I shall speak to them on their behalf.

If we cannot make such comparisons between the levels of charges in different parts of the country, we will lose a significant right in terms of the representations that can be made to the powers that be.

The right of committees to comment is also being circumscribed, and I believe that it should be strengthened. In particular, their reports must not be restricted in any way; they should be published openly and be as widely available as possible. That is what gives the committees the powers that they need. If the amendments are not accepted, the watchdogs that we now have are in danger of being emasculated. They should be strengthened; they should not be turned into the Government's poodle.

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I welcome what my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Trahsport said about fares, and I hope that he will elaborate further in his concluding remarks. I also welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about concessionary fares and travelcards. We all know how important those are in London, and I am very pleased with the concessions the Government have made today.

My question arises from my hon. Friend the Minister's introductory remarks, in which he referred to yesterday's debate and elaborated three new principles that he wanted the franchising director to take into account. My question is simple: what is the standing of the franchise agreement? I presume that all the details of any particular franchise agreement will be fully in the public domain and the public will know exactly what it will contain. The logic of the Government's position, as I understand it, is that any franchise agreement will initially be based on the existing services, schedules and performance targets for an area. Therefore, surely there can be no commercial secrecy about exactly what is involved in the agreement. It will be a matter of open record, against which the performance of the franchisee will be judged. That is an important consideration, and I should like my hon. Friend to comment on it and to tell me, for the record, whether I have understood it correctly.

Dr. Marek: Amendment No. 237 was tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). It is important that when the Government table an appropriate amendment in another place—as they said they would—the phrase "reasonable to consumers" is always borne in mind. It is vital that the word "passengers" or "consumers" should accompany the word "reasonable", because we can use that word in all sorts of other senses.

If the Government now accept that principle—I welcome that prospect—it cuts the ground from under their feet regarding their argument in Committee, when they refused to let the consultative committees talk about fares, except in a restricted sense. It is true that the Government moved a little, but they should now think again. Fares will no longer be left to the open market and, therefore, be outside the vires of any consultative committee, because the franchising director will now decide an upper limit for what is reasonable. Therefore, it should be within the powers of the consultative committees to pronounce on the subject.

I hope that the Government do not resist the amendments. If they do, they will have to explain carefully why, having resisted them in Committee on the ground that the market rather than any consultative committee would decide such matters, they have now accepted the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling which says that the franchising director rather than the unfettered market will decide. The Government will have either to accept the amendments or use a completely new and different argument as to why they should not be accepted.

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I warmly welcome the commitment by my hon. Friend the Minister to give the franchising director the clear additional powers over fares, and I look forward to the amendment that will return to the House following the debate in the House of Lords on the issue. Yesterday when we debated the issue I said in an intervention that in rail privatisation we lacked an individual who was comparable with regulators in other privatisations, in his role concerning price control. I hoped that Ministers would respond to what was said yesterday and increase the opportunity for the franchising director to play a full part in the setting of fares, and I entirely welcome the movement from Ministers today.

I also wish to support the other two amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), which deal with the involvement of the national and regional consultative committees and their ability to comment on and to have an input into fare levels. My right hon. Friend was right to say, especially in view of the amendments made in Committee to allow the consultative committees to have a say on special fares of various kinds, that it was illogical that they were not allowed to comment—indeed, they were positively disbarred by law from commenting—on the fares that most people would pay. I therefore support the amendments and I look to my right hon. and hon. Friends to respond positively to the pleas of the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are discussing Government amendment No. 109, which would leave out the words

"for the purposes of this Part"

from subsection (2). Yet subsection (4)(a) states that

"subsections (2) and (3) above and subsections (6) to (8) below"

do not apply. I do not ask my hon. Friend the Minister to answer my question now, but will he consider whether that really means what the Government want it to mean? Subsection (3) seems to refer to the fact that there

"shall be one consultative committee for Scotland and one for Wales",

whereas subsection (4) says that

"the London Regional Passengers' Committee shall be treated as the consultative committee for . . . London',

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

and will not therefore be appointed by the regulator. That is a slightly technical point, and maybe the Government have got it right, but I should like them to check before the provision goes to another place.

I have tried to avoid making this point too often in the House, but as the representative of people in my constituency who use the trains in London, I must emphasise that the rail service into London is one of the most vital services for people in Eltham, as for many others, especially in south London. My constituents are interested in their existing services being maintained, and preferably not deteriorating, as is happening on Sundays. They also hope that there is a reasonable prospect of services improving. Better rolling stock—that is coming. More reliability—that may come. More capacity—that will come if the Thameslink 2000 improvements outside London Bridge and Borough market take place. Those prospects may not fall entirely within the amendments, but my constituents are keenly interested in them.

I have a slight worry on the fares issue. I appreciate that one does not want to constrain franchise holders too much, but I ask myself why, if they will be able to go in for market pricing, I bothered to help write into Bills governing fares at the Elizabeth bridge at Dartford on the M25 provisions to stop exploitation there. Why did we devise a complicated system for approving fare increases on the Severn bridge, for example, where market pricing would have allowed scalping? I do not believe that the franchise holders will want to go in for scalping on rail services, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) has done well to bring the issue directly to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I hope that the assurances given will be satisfactory to him. They will be greatly reassuring to my constituents. We look forward to seeing how far amendments Nos. 239 and 242 are duplicated by the Government's proposals in another place.

8 pm

Mr. Freeman: I shall seek further advice on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley). I hope to communicate information to my hon. Friend during the evening. If he is not satisfied with the response, he will doubtless have an opportunity to raise the matter a little later in our proceedings. If he is satisfied, I shall write to him on the point.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) spoke of the status of the franchise agreement. I have given a commitment on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that we shall publish a further draft of the objectives of the franchising director while the Bill is still before Parliament. My right hon. Friend gave that commitment again earlier today. We have also said that a further draft of the model franchise agreement, an earlier draft of which was tabled in Committee, will be available to Parliament. Certain amendments to that model franchise agreement were suggested in Committee. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) suggested that that might be appropriate before the ScotRail franchise was proceeded with. I accepted in Committee that it would be helpful to look at the headings in a typical franchise agreement, although the specific franchise agreement for a particular route will contain commercially confidential information. Undoubtedly, much of that information will become available because the agreement will deal with punctuality, reliability, the safety of services and the cleanliness of trains. That information will be in the public domain.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington is a member of the Public Accounts Committee. It will not be surprising if the Public Accounts Committee takes a great deal of interest in the early franchises. I look forward to supplying information from the Department of Transport on the subject of franchising which is appropriate and needed by Parliament.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) spoke to amendments Nos. 239 and 242. He understands that they are important amendments because they would permit the consultative committees to comment on any aspect of fares. Under the Bill at present, the ability of the consultative committees to comment is related to the structure and relativity of fares, but not to specific fares on specific lines. The thrust of the amendments is to give the consultative committees that right. The committees are, of course, very interested in fare levels and proposed fare increases, and they have not hidden their views under a bushel. They have obviously expressed their views.

We are happy to accept the text of amendments Nos. 239 and 242. They do not cover the London regional passengers committee. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling may not have been able to pick up the fact that we have dealt with the LRPC at a different point in the Bill. The reason for that is that the appointments and the size and responsibilities of that committee are different. I give my right hon. Friend a clear assurance that, because we have accepted the text of the two amendments, we shall re-table them in another place with the appropriate extension to cover the LRPC, which will make the amendments effective. I cannot be clearer in the assurance that I give my right hon. Friend and my other hon. Friends——

Hon. Members *indicated assent.*

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for hon. Members' assent. My understanding is that because amendments Nos. 239 and 242 provide a wide power, amendments Nos. 240, 241, 243 and 244 are not so necessary.

Sir John Stanley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for indicating that he will not seek to press those amendments to a Division.

I hope that, with those assurances, the House will be content. We welcome the role of the consultative committees. This is the first occasion on which I have had a chance to debate with the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) will assure the House that in Committee we repeatedly gave assurances about the role of the consultative committees. Indeed, we reached agreement with the chairman of the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee about its appropriate powers. I am sure that the chairman and the members will welcome this further

extension. We satisfied them on all other counts that they would have a vital role to play under the general aegis of the regulator. They have a role to play in the closure procedure, and they will now have an important role to play in fares. That is to be welcomed.

I hope that, with those comments, the House will accept Government amendment No. 109 and that in due course, when we come to consider the other amendments to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling spoke, my assurances will be accepted. I hope that the House will accept Government amendment No. 109.

Sir John Stanley: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for accepting the important amendments Nos. 239 and 242, which substantially enhance the consumer protection afforded by the Bill. I also accept that I failed to spot the fact that buried away in schedule 11 were the special arrangements for London. To that extent, the amendments were defective and we need to add equivalent amendments for London. I know that my hon. Friend will put that right in another place. I speak for all my hon. Friends in expressing our appreciation to him for wisely accepting the amendments. I am grateful.

Mr. Wilson: By leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I welcome what the Minister has said on the issue. It is perfectly true that considerable progress was made in Committee on the consultative committees. It is logical that, among the other matters that the consultative committees consider, they should also be able to speak on fares. The matter goes further than that. The job now is to encourage them to speak on fares and to take a lively interest in them, especially in the light of what has been said about the role of the franchising director, and about his ability to control fares and to ensure that the market does not operate.

It is strange that, now that the hubbub has died down and less attention is being paid to what is going on here than was the case earlier, what the Minister has told us tonight about the controls on fares and about the role of the franchising director is probably the most important announcement made today.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 4

General duties of the Secretary of State and the Regulator

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I beg to move amendment No. 227, in page 4, line 19, at end insert—

"(h) to protect the interests of rail users living in rural areas or on the route of predominantly rural railway lines.".

The fact that the Bill is driven at least partly by the need to modify the United Kingdom's current economic difficulties by raising ready cash for current spending emphasises the need for a commitment to protect predominantly rural lines to be included on the face of the Bill. Hon. Members will be aware of the findings of the Transport 2000 report, which concludes that any savings resulting from privatisation will be heavily outweighed by extra costs of various kinds, leading among other things to "the closure of most rural train services."

Any proposal to close any line in Wales will be met by public fury. Such a response would be wholly justified.

Let me give an example. The Cambrian main line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth is classed as a rural line. In the Transport 2000 scenario, it would be a candidate for closure. The effect of such a closure would be disastrous. At Aberystwyth we have a centre of higher education and research of international significance. The education and research activity is not only important in itself; it is fundamental to the economy of the western seaboard of Wales.

The institutions that constitute the core of the economy of Aberystwyth and its hinterland—the University of Wales in the town, the Welsh agricultural college, the national library of Wales, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research and others—deservedly attract substantial public and private funding. For example, the University of Wales in Aberystwyth will receive £13,600,000 this year from the Welsh Higher Education Funding Council. The railway line linking all those institutions to the rest of Britain, including London and the south-east—which is the immediate source of a considerable amount of their funding—is literally vital. It is essential for journeys to conferences, seminars and committee meetings, to attend and deliver lectures and so on. It is essential for the rapidly expanding student body which patronises it extensively and economic development of other sorts through the Development Board for Rural Wales. Public funding is made available to provide factory space and so on and funding is provided through the Wales tourist board to enhance the area's attractiveness for tourism.

The money that is made available to the Aberystwyth-Shrewsbury line from the public service obligation grant —it is about £2·5 million per annum—and bodies such as the DBRW and local authorities is well spent. It needs to be seen not as a subsidy to prop up an unprofitable line but as essential investment. Without that funding, other public and private sector money would be money down the drain.

Not all rural lines are able to make such ambitious claims as the Aberystwyth to Shrewsbury line, but they have a highly significant role in their various ways. The closure of the Cambrian coast line from Meirionnydd to Pwllheli would be a bitter blow to the economy and communities of Meirionnydd, Dvyfor and Arfon.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does my hon. Friend accept that the line to Pwllheli is absolutely vital not only for the local community but for the tourist industry, which is one of the main industries in the area? The area has high unemployment and is threatened with losing intermediate development status.

Mr. Dafis: My hon. Friend's point underlines the theme that I am pursuing—that is, that grants of this sort must be seen as part of public investment and part of the economic prosperity of the areas in which they operate. At the same time, the loss of the glorious heart of Wales line would be a serious deprivation to extensive rural communities and would eliminate the link between the Cambrian and Great Western lines. Those lines are important. But if they are important today, they will be more important in the future.

Tomorrow, European Standing Committee B will consider, among other things, a draft directive from the European Community introducing a tax on carbon dioxide emissions and energy. That is a straw in the wind indicating the way in which that wind is blowing. We are

[Mr. Dafis]

witnessing no less than the hesitant setting out on the difficult journey towards environmental sustainability. As to where that journey will take us, one can only theorise at this stage. But no one should underestimate the enormous implications of the need to achieve environmental sustainability. What is certain is that it must involve a massive shift in emphasis from private to public transport and from road to rail. In turn, that means that any area that lacks a railway in the future will be more severely disadvantaged than it is at present. We must not allow the difficulties and inefficiencies created by privatisation to undermine the key component in the economy of the future. That is why we need this amendment on the face of the Bill.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Government's proposals for franchising announced yesterday—they were praised in some areas—are totally unacceptable to the people of Wales. What logic on earth can justify a structure that puts Fishguard with Penzance, Pwllheli with Lowestoft, Barmouth with Yarmouth and Blaenau Ffestiniog and Holyhead with Carlisle? The proposals will fragment the Welsh railway service, leaving most Welsh routes peripheralised. It is no less than an attack on the national integrity of Wales.

Even at this late stage we demand that the Government adopt the imaginative and practical proposal of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs that a Wales and the Marches railway be established and franchising—if, alas, it must come—be based on that structure. It is a well researched and firm proposal. It was studied and is supported by the Select Committee. That is the only way in which we can hope for an expanding rail service that is relevant to Welsh needs and—this is equally important and perfectly possible—an integrated transport policy for Wales. The Welsh Office is responsible for Welsh highways. It should also be made responsible for funding the rural railways of Wales. If we do not receive an undertaking from the Government to provide such a structure, we shall force a Division on the amendment.

8.15 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for tabling the amendment because the issue is extremely important. The amendment draws attention to the importance of the rural rail network and the need to secure it. The hon. Gentleman understandably—because he comes from a Welsh constituency—talked especially about Wales. I apologise for not being here at the beginning of his speech.

I am sure that the Minister is well aware that there is considerable concern in the rural areas of Scotland about the future of the network. At the beginning of May, there was an event in Inverness that involved Liberal Democrat Members and people from all over the north of Scotland. More than 200 people were in the town house in Inverness demonstrating their support for the railway network in the north of Scotland and their concern for its future.

One of the people who spoke in support of the campaign that we were launching at that juncture was a member of the Conservative party and a councillor for Caithness and Sutherland. He expressed his extreme disquiet as to how on earth the fragile rail network in the north of Scotland could survive franchising, let alone full privatisation. There were representatives from the Scottish National party, the Green party and the railway development society at the event, as well as many representatives from the Liberal Democrat party.

All the lines that serve the north of Scotland lose money. It is difficult to see how on earth they can make money in a straightforward business sense for the simple reason that they cover long distances over sparsely populated areas where, although tourism is a major attraction and source of revenue, they are a permanent year-round link for people who live in the area. That is the real concern of the local community.

If one goes to the west highlands, there is no doubt whatever that the number of people travelling on the Kyle line—it is one of the most attractive and scenic routes in Britain and perhaps in Europe—bring an enormous amount of business to the communities of Kyle of Lochalsh and Skye which would not otherwise arrive if there were no railway. Many people simply would not go if they had to go by road. It is the attraction of the rail service that takes them there.

Obviously, the same argument applies to the West Highland line that goes from Fort William to Mallaig and across to Skye. Such services are absolutely vital. ScotRail recently announced that it will no longer take tanker freight on the west coast line and freight will now have to travel on a wholly inadequate road. A decision was made last year to change the basis on which freight would be accepted on the railway line that most directly affects my constituency—the one running between Aberdeen and Inverness. At one point, we were faced with the possibility of a substantial amount of timber traffic, whisky industry traffic and paper industry traffic being diverted from the railway line on to the A96. Ministers have acknowledged that the A96 is one of the busiest and most dangerous roads in the north of Scotland. A £100 million upgrade programme has been launched for it.

Yet the road is wholly inadequate for the extra traffic that would have to travel on it if the railway line was even run down—never mind closed—and freight could not be handled on it. The amendment is important. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister how a ScotRail franchise will fundamentally change the nature of the service in ways that will reassure the community in the north of Scotland. I can tell him that the community is not assured by the present state of the service or its future development.

The Minister will be well aware of the changes in the fare structure that were introduced last week. As a consequence, some regular travellers on the line between Inverness and Aberdeen in the constituency of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) and in my constituency face fare increases of up to 60 per cent. If people cannot absorb such an increase, they will travel by car on a road which is already congested and, of course, deprive the railways of the revenue. One is left with the suspicion—I put it no higher than that—that ScotRail is about discouraging people from using the railways to the point at which it can justify cutting the service and perhaps ultimately phase out the lines which lose the most money.

The House will be interested to hear how the Minister believes that his proposals will not merely protect the lines but ensure that the service is developed and used in the way that local communities want. That requires several things. It requires a competitive fare structure that will attract people on to the network, services that connect with the

main line inter-city services to the south, rolling stock that meets the needs of passengers, and reliability of service. None of those things is available now.

If the Minister's argument is that, by definition, franchising or privatisation must be an improvement, he must tell the House how and why. As far as I understand it, the main applicants for the franchises are likely to be the existing management of ScotRail. If the managers are not managing now, it is difficult to see how they will do so in the same basic scenario. They need investment, a proper transport policy and a commitment to a future for rural lines. Rural lines must be not only protected but developed and invested in. We must have a proper transport policy to secure their future and use them in the interests of the whole community.

I welcome the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis). If I do not receive assurances, I shall certainly join him in the Lobby.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) has tabled a useful amendment. In Committee many amendments were tabled to clause 4, which deals with the duties of the regulator. Although amendments were tabled which encompassed amendment No. 227, a specific amendment to that effect was not tabled. As the topic is new, it has been chosen for debate. I welcome that. The hon. Gentleman has my support principally because the subsections of clause 4 will be many and varied.

Clause 4 will create a conflict of duty for the regulator. He will have to decide whether he should place more weight on one duty under clause 4 or on another. If amendment No. 227 is accepted, the Bill will say explicitly that an important part of the railway network must be considered by the regulator. It is even more important that the clause should include such a requirement in view of the map which the Government have produced for the franchise networks.

I shall not deal with all the networks. Let us examine one franchise network. The one called Central is a huge amorphous mass which stretched from East Anglia to the west coast of Wales. It is clear from the map that the lines in Wales will be peripheral to the organisation that will run the Central franchise. Such lines will not make a profit because the lines are a service to the people. They are part of the social railway, so they will depend for their existence on grant or subsidy from the Government. Subsidy is not a dirty word; it is there for good social reasons.

The lines in Wales will demand more subsidy than the lines in the west midlands or east midlands. As he will have to satisfy the shareholders, the franchisee will look for where he can make savings to increase profits. That will always be at the expense of the lines in Wales.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a subsidy for socially necessary lines will be guaranteed for only three years under current Treasury rules? Does he share my anxiety about the future after that initial honeymoon period?

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. It was put well by the late Lord Ridley—perhaps it was a deathbed repentance. What he said was right. Once the franchise has been granted, after three, four or five years the franchisee will say that the subsidy is not high enough. He may say that a recession or something else has occurred and that he needs more subsidy. But the Treasury will say —certainly with the Government's handling of the economy, bringing it to the brink of ruin—that there is a £50 billion public sector borrowing requirement and that it must cut the subsidy. What will happen after that?

Rural lines in Wales will be threatened with closure as a result of the Government's proposals. I have no doubt about that. It will happen because the lines in Wales will be peripheral to the franchise.

It will be worse than that. The inter-city lines will probably be truncated. I doubt whether we shall have any inter-city lines to Holyhead after the three-year period comes to an end or after four or five years. It is far more likely that the west coast main line inter-city service will operate along the main line proper, going to Liverpool, Manchester and perhaps Preston, but that feeder services will be run from Crewe to Holyhead. The same thing will happen on the Great Western main line from London to Cardiff. Perhaps services in Swansea will not be up to the present frequency. There will certainly be no inter-city services to Carmarthen or Fishguard.

I am depressed by what is happening and by the large franchises that the Government propose. They will not do Wales any good whatever. The centre of operations will be Birmingham. Wales will be an encumbrance to the franchisee. It will be something that the shareholders can do without. It will lose money. Evening services will be cut.

The Railtrack authority will not have so much incentive to keep the track bed in good condition, so the services will be slower. There is one thing that we can do. Opposition Members do not have the powers that Conservative Members such as the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) and the hon. Member for Ashford (Sir K. Speed) have; those powers are welcome and they use them well. They have achieved a few concessions. It is all very well the Minister saying that the Central Rail Users Consultative Committee should be able to consider fares. He did not say that to me in Committee two months ago.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does my hon. Friend recognise that the concessions may have been won at our expense? In the past 48 hours we have had talk of capping to assuage the fears of some Conservative Members. The concept of socially necessary railways may be replaced by politically necessary railways.

8.30 pm

Dr. Marek: That is very likely, but I do not want to be rude to the Minister at this stage because there is a possibility that he will accept this amendment. He has been very good off and on this afternoon. I shall try to catch your eye later on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if he proves not be as helpful as he has been.

Wales suffers from this peripherality problem in the north, the centre and the south. He should do something about it, and one of the things he could do is to accept the amendment of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I am a co-signatory of this amendment and I believe that many hon. Members are grateful that it has been called so that we can discuss the issue of rural railways.

I wish first, on behalf of all my colleagues on the nationalist Bench, to place on record our great respect for

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

Robert Adley, who was the Chairman of the Transport Select Committee. Those of us who were here in the 1970s remember him well. We will very much miss his independent spirit, his approach and his kindness to all hon. Members, as well as the respect in which he held every point of view. I speak very personally, since Bob was a neighbour of mine in London, living directly opposite me in Pimlico. I shall miss him as a very kind personal friend.

Turning now to amendment No. 227, as I have said, many of us welcome the fact that there is an opportunity to discuss at Report stage our great concerns about the future of railways in rural areas. Many of us can speak about aspects in our own constituencies and I, of course, will do that. But I hope that the Minister will bear in mind that those of us who speak on behalf of our rural areas are also taking on board the importance and significance for all other rural areas of the United Kingdom.

I wish to refer in particular to the Inverness to Aberdeen railway, which has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Inverness is, of course, the capital of the highlands of Scotland and Aberdeen is the oil capital of Europe. There are 109 track miles between those two centres and they are a very vital 109 miles. The stations along that line—not only in my constituency, but in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and for Gordon—Nairn, Forres, Elgin, Keith, Huntly, Insch and Dyce, are all extremely significant to the economy of our communities.

Two of the stations within my constituency, Forres and Elgin, may have particular memories for the Minister in his previous capacity in the Ministry of Defence, because they are vital to the two RAF bases of Kinloss and Lossiemouth, serving not only the personnel on those bases, but their families and friends. They are vital to the whole life of our communities. There are the commuters who travel daily, perhaps westward to Inverness or eastward to Aberdeen, for their jobs. Many people are attracted to our area because of its beautiful environment, the hospitality of our people and the fact that it is a very pleasant area to visit. It is vital that our tourist industry is sustained if we are to compete with other areas.

This is also an extremely important line for students in my constituency who travel to Inverness college or to Aberdeen, to one of the two universities there, or to some of the other colleges.

I refer particularly to something that has happened recently. From Keith, in my constituency, a student who formerly paid a fare of £7·25 daily is now expected to pay £11·50 daily—an increase of 60 per cent. Many of these people are mature students and perhaps single parents, who may be turned away from training and education opportunities.

I therefore argue strongly that we should think carefully about those who use the line and ensure that they are asked to pay only economic fares, making it possible for them to promote their careers and their future.

The same applies to our pensioners, who are now expected to pay an increase of 50 per cent. Yet, for pensioners, the opportunity to visit Inverness or Aberdeen is vital to their social lives.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is worth emphasising to the Minister, in case he is not aware of it, that, because of the accommodation crisis for the two universities in Aberdeen, students live in a very large area served by the railway line in my hon. Friend's constituency, and also live in my constituency, where there is no railway at all. They are forced to travel each day as they cannot be offered accommodation by the unversities because of the exceptional pressure on rents and properties in Aberdeen.

Mrs. Ewing: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. That is a point that should be emphasised, because all the stations along this line serve a very substantial rural hinterland. They do not serve the town or village alone; they serve a large number of people who travel by bus or car to the stations to travel on to Aberdeen or Inverness.

We should not forget the businesses in our community. I never cease to remind the House that my constituency contains 43 whisky distilleries—some of the biggest money-spinners that the Exchequer has in the United Kingdom. It is very important to that business that we have good communications, not least because the whisky industry attracts many tourists who want to follow the whisky trail and spend money in our communities.

We have agriculture, fishing and timber and their associated processing industries. They need to be able to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the European Community. If there is any threat to the Inverness-Aberdeen line, a substantial part of the economy, not only of the north-east and the highlands of Scotland, but of the United Kingdom, will be threatened.

At the moment ScotRail appears to have decided to de-man our stations in the rural communities. It seems that in Forres and Keith there will be no cover in the evenings for people either boarding or alighting from the trains. This is particularly important for women and students, young people who are perhaps afraid to get off the train because of the surrounding conditions.

I ask the Minister seriously to look carefully at assuring the future of this line, the safety, and the level of fares that will make it an economic line, and at guaranteeing that there will be no rundown of the service.

The current fears in my constituency are perhaps epitomised by an article in the *Banffshire Herald*, under the headline:

"ScotRail fares shock for Keith young people",

in which ScotRail says that, having always thought that it was an independent organisation, it now has to folllow national rulings on fares and manning levels.

These fears are now being exacerbated by the prospect of a franchising system which would make this line one of those threatened, and I make a strong plea that it be given special consideration.

Mr. Wilson: This is an important debate and it is noticeable that rural Wales and rural Scotland are well represented here, while the voice of rural England is largely notable by its absence. I would think that there are large parts of England where rural services are threatened and it might have been prudent, from a sense of self-preservation, at least to listen to what is being said, even if not supporting the amendment in the Division.

There is no doubt that, if the Bill goes ahead in its present form, a substantial number of rural services will disappear within a relatively short time. That is because there will not be the money in the system to sustain them. It will not be in the system that is at present run by Regional Railways and, as my hon. Friend the Member

for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said, there will be particuarly serious implications for InterCity services to the peripheries, for reasons which we discussed last night.

I was interested in the point made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) about the Welsh franchises. He is absolutely right; it is an extraordinary dog's breakfast and the Welsh are right to take such an attitude towards it. I was also interested in his point that the Welsh Select Committee had made a powerful and well-considered argument in favour of a Welsh railway entity similar to that which exists in Scotland. Scottish regional services have been categorised as a franchise.

It is worth drawing attention to the contrast between what happened in Scotland and what happened in Wales. In Scotland there was no argument from the Select Committee or anyone else in favour of franchising the entire Scottish service. That is confirmed by the fact that, whereas the ludicrous approach which characterises the Bill has been applied in Wales, in Scotland the rationale for turning ScotRail into a private railway is not because there is any intrinsic merit in it but because that approach has been built round an expression of interest. The Government are so desperate to get interest in management buy-outs that when one emerged in Scotland it was seized on and used as a justification for their approach.

I have no doubt that if the legislation takes its logical course, there will be rural closures. Some of the reasons have been mentioned already and I shall not repeat them. It is clear that there will not be enough money in the system. I shall briefly dwell on two additional reasons that have not been mentioned in the debate.

One of the buzz words of the legislation has been transparency. I would not wish to misquote the Minister, but I think that he said in Committee in a very grand manner that transparency was an important principle of Conservatism. I remarked that transparency is something that one can see through. When applied to the legislation, transparency is an immensely dangerous concept for rural rail services.

The opposite of transparency is cross-subsidy. At present, we have a sensible arrangement whereby we have loss-making lines and profit-making lines and a balance between them because we are operating a social railway and the social ethos and commitment is accepted. However, in the brave new world that the Minister is trying to create there will be transparency. There, for all to see, will be the costs and the revenue attached to each line. As soon as the figures emerge, the threat to the existence of the heavily loss-making lines will be multiplied overnight by many factors.

The Government will be able to say from day one, "Is not it absurd that we are paying this level of subsidy per passenger when there is a bus service? Why not substitute the bus service for the railway?" That argument will be advanced from an early stage. Because the operators will have a vested interest in getting rid of the services, every trick in the book will be deployed to create a level of usage and therefore a ratio between a usage and a subsidy that will appear so absurd that they will be able to withdraw the service. Transparency is an important factor and a serious threat, particularly to rural services.

Another reason of which I have become aware when travelling around Scotland, England and Wales is the fact that in rural areas and remoter parts of the country geographical conditions often produce particularly difficult and expensive problems in maintaining the railway. That is quite logical when one thinks about it. I pay tribute to the engineers and the genuine entrepreneurs —as opposed to the chancers who rip off public assets today—who built the railways, the viaducts and the infrastructure in rural areas. However, that infrastructure is difficult to maintain.

When the Bill becomes law, the costs that attach to each line will be set against that line and not against the system. I have discussed the effect of that in a local context in the south-west of England, the north of Wales, the Lake District and, of course, Scotland.

The classic example was the floods in Scotland in January when two bridges were washed away. From the day after the incident happened, ScotRail and British Rail were on the scene. There were no questions asked about whether the work should go ahead on the two bridges in Perthshire and the line brought back into operation as quickly as possible. British Rail was bringing back into operation lines which had and always would be loss making but on which rural services were dependent. To do that, without any doubt or delay, it spent £1 million.

8.45 pm

What would happen in future is very much open to question. It will not be British Rail that will be charged with the responsibility or the decision about what to do with the loss-making routes and the reopening of the bridges; it will be Railtrack, which will be under commercial instruction to get an 8 per cent. return on profits. Where that £1 million would come from to restore the bridges is in itself questionable. If it were found, it would be set against the costs of that particular line and no other. However, Railtrack could decide not to spend £1 million and to close the line.

I am sure that hon. Members representing all rural parts of Britain can identify similar problems in their own areas where viaducts, embankments and bridges are extremely expensive to maintain and where, without exceptional expenditure, the lines will close.

There are two additional reasons why rural railways will be very much under threat. No assurance that the Minister can offer tonight will change the picture as they are intrinsic factors which will create grave doubts for many of the lines. The Minister cannot tell me tonight that in the same circumstances Railtrack would have spent £1 million to bring a loss-making railway back into use as Railtrack will have a commercial imperative laid upon it by the Government.

It is an important issue. Everything running through the Bill concerns rural areas, but I am happy to discuss them in a specific context, as we did in Committee, and to emphasise what is obviously a concern to me in Scotland, but also applies throughout Britain—that rural rail services are endangered and the Bill presents the gravest threat to them since the existing network was established and settled more than 20 years ago.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) says that he is at least one of the voices that speaks for rural Scotland. I speak for rural England and, frankly, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have been infuriated by the fact that the hon. Gentleman believes that if he repeats often enough the false assertion that rural railway lines will close, it will happen. It will not

[Mr. Freeman]

happen and I want to explain concisely but clearly to the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) why his rural railway services are not under threat.

First, we have given a commitment that subsidies for our socially necessary services will continue. The level of support from central Government and from local authorities will vary depending upon the profitability of the railway services. That subsidy is now running at the rate of about £1,000 million per annum. It fell in the middle of the 1980s when fare revenues were rising. Broadly speaking, at the beginning of the 1980s, they were at the same level as they are today. We have given a clear commitment that central Government—the taxpayer—will support socially necessary services.

I have been debating that point with the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North for four months, week in, week out, and he is still not convinced that the change in the public service obligation grant this year compared with last year does not represent a threat to rural railway services or to Network SouthEast services.

The railways must adjust the frequency of their services in response to demand. The change in the public service obligation provision for this year compared with last year—it is the only year for which we have made a proper forecast; there are indications of how the external financing limit for British Rail might be split in future years, but we will not fix the PSO grant until just before the beginning of the financial year—has occurred for the good reasons of an increase in fare revenue, a diminution in costs and a change in the level of investment in rolling stock.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister is making the obvious point that railway revenue is cyclical—that in time of recession the revenue goes down and that during better economic circumstances it goes up. That is one of our fears. The Minister is saying that, in time of recession, the railways need more support than they require in different economic circumstances. Yet the Government are not engaged in a process of making radical cuts and reassessments of whole areas of public spending. Is he now saying that the railways will be immune from the assessment that is currently being made?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is misinformed because if he casts his mind back a couple of years he will see, if he studies the figures fairly, that the PSO grant was increased in mid-year for two years running as a result of the recession—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it was increased by upwards of £500 million.

Mr. Alan Williams: How can the Minister give such assurances when the axe-wielding Chief Secretary is wandering around saying that absolutely nothing is sacred?

Mr. Freeman: If the economy is running at such a level that fare revenues are up—and obviously every extra pound that BR can attract from fare revenues largely goes straight down to the bottom line, because once one runs a train, most of one's costs are already sunk—less public support is needed to run an existing level of service. We have given a commitment to support socially necessary services. Next, we have said that we intend to franchise all railway services in Great Britain, including all the rural railway lines to which reference was made.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North referred to the franchise map. That map is based on the existing route structures of British Rail. Ministers did not decide how to arrange the provision of railway services in Great Britain. BR did that. We have simply said that we think it is sensible to build on the existing management structure of BR to franchise the services. So the hon. Gentleman should be directing his concerns to BR, not to Ministers, because we have said that we believe it to be sensible to proceed with the minimum reorganisation of BR's management structures.

Under the closure procedure, in the circumstance of a franchisee—or, indeed, BR—finding that there is not sufficient patronage, even with subsidy and the franchisee running services that were in the timetable immediately before the franchise, and there is need to close a station or a particular railway service, we have the toughest closure provisions in western Europe in terms of the procedures that must be followed, involving the rail users consultative committees and ultimately an appeal to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): The possible closure issue is of particular concern. Does the Minister appreciate the valid point made by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) about instances of a reduction in service, for example, a change from InterCity to regional use? That danger exists in north Wales. We fear that in three or four years from now, the InterCity service might be reduced or removed along the north Wales coastline and we shall be left with Regional Railways. What assurances can the Minister give that that will not happen?

Mr. Freeman: There are many complaints about the prospect of reductions in service. The InterCity service to Holyhead is part of the InterCity network and is part of the west coast main line railway services. When we come to franchise the west coast main line, it will be done on the basis of the services that then prevail. I am certain that that will include Holyhead, so the Holyhead services will be included in that franchise.

I accept the point made by several hon. Members about the potential for the development of lines, particularly for tourism, not only in rural Wales but in Scotland. We expect franchisees to take risks and decisions to expand railway services, particularly in the summer, because BR as a state monopolist is not a risk-taker. It has a precise overdraft and is therefore somewhat constrained. I am not criticising BR because that is the nature of a public sector body. But the private sector franchisee will take risks and will exploit the market where additional services can be provided. On the basis of discussions with potential franchisees operating in Wales and Scotland, I am certain that that will happen.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Can I take it from what my hon. Friend said that the west coast rail link will go through? He suggested in a recent letter to me that the matter was open to certain tenders, options and the rest. I am delighted to hear that the west coast rail link will go through. Does he agree that many people who are now coming from Shrewsbury and other rural areas will make great use of that west coast link? It will be a highly

cost-effective arrangement which will ensure that people get the kind of treatment that the Bill is designed to provide.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. I confirm that the west coast main line service will be franchised.

The argument of the hon. Member for Wrexham that he needs the amendment does not stand up. He will see that clause 4(1) says that both

"the Secretary of State and the Regulator shall each have a duty . . . to protect the interests of users of railway services".

That applies to all railway services—rural, suburban and InterCity. Why should one write into the Bill a provision just for rural railway services?

Mrs. Ewing: Why not?

Mr. Freeman: Because once we started doing that, we should have to add every category of railway service that is comprised of BR's services. I hope that, on that logical basis alone, the amendment will not be pressed to a Division, and I suspect that it will not be.

Mr. Salmond: I had a feeling of déjà vu as the Minister was speaking. My mind went back to the debates of about five years ago when we were discussing the privatisation of the steel industry. Ministers were then assuring us that privatisation would make no difference to the future of the Ravenscraig steel plant. We were accused of scaremongering. Indeed, Ministers adduced a host of reasons to suggest that privatisation would assist the future of Ravenscraig.

We found what we suspected: that privatisation was used as an excuse for the Government to wash their hands of responsibility for the future of the steel industry. The privatisation process was used—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the voices of rural England behind the Minister are finally entering the debate. Conservative Members may like to enter the debate rather than mutter from a sedentary position. That particularly applies to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes).

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): What on earth has that got to do with the amendment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Mr. Salmond.

Mr. Salmond: I know that the hon. Gentleman gets a little sleepy because of his commitments to late night television, but even he should be able to grasp the significance of a comparison between the two privatisations.

My point was that Ministers subsequently used the steel privatisation as an excuse or pretext for washing their hands of the future of the industry. I suspect that the same will apply in the case of the railways. The Minister tells the House that there is no need to write protection for rural railways into the Bill, but that argument carries little credibility. He argues, weakly, that we should respect his assurance that the Government will subsidise the railways by way of a counter-cyclical effect on the privatised railways lines. These are times of economic stringency when everything else is up for grabs. The Treasury is threatening to introduce highly unpopular charges in the NHS and even mortgage tax relief has been targeted——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair has now decided that the hon. Gentleman is straying too far from the amendment.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister argued that the railways would be immune from the process of cost-cutting—a difficult argument to sustain, and it carries no conviction and swayed no sentiment. We believe that the privatisation process will be used as a pretext for the Government to wash their hands of the future of the railway system, and that system will be most at risk on the rural lines of Scotland, Wales and England.

9 pm

Mr. Dafis: The justification for the amendment is clear. It is generally recognised that rural lines are especially vulnerable because of their infrastructure costs—viaducts, and so on—and because they serve scattered populations. But they are certainly crucial to people who live in areas remote from population centres.

This vulnerability is explicity recognised in the recent report, "Transport 2000". The amendment would certainly be useful and it is necessary, we think, to mention in the Bill the responsibilities of the franchising authority for rural lines. The Minister is not prepared to accept the amendment, so I am afraid that I will have to ask the House to divide on it.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 172, Noes 299.

Division No. 282] **[9.1 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene	Eastham, Ken
Ainger, Nick	Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*	Faulds, Andrew
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Ashton, Joe	Foulkes, George
Austin-Walker, John	Fraser, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Gapes, Mike
Barnes, Harry	George, Bruce
Barron, Kevin	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Bayley, Hugh	Godsiff, Roger
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.	Golding, Mrs Llin
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Graham, Thomas
Bennett, Andrew F.	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Benton, Joe	Grocott, Bruce
Betts, Clive	Gunnell, John
Boyce, Jimmy	Hain, Peter
Boyes, Roland	Hanson, David
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*	Hardy, Peter
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*	Harvey, Nick
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Heppell, John
Burden, Richard	Hinchliffe, David
Caborn, Richard	Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Callaghan, Jim	Hood, Jimmy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*	Hoon, Geoffrey
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*	Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Canavan, Dennis	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Cann, Jamie	Illsley, Eric
Chisholm, Malcolm	Ingram, Adam
Clapham, Michael	Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*	Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Coffey, Ann	Jamieson, David
Connarty, Michael	Janner, Greville
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Johnston, Sir Russell
Cox, Tom	Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Cryer, Bob	Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*	Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John	Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Dafis, Cynog	Jowell, Tessa
Dalyell, Tam	Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Darling, Alistair	Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Dewar, Donald	Khabra, Piara S.
Dixon, Don	Kirkwood, Archy
Dunnachie, Jimmy	Leighton, Ron
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth	Litherland, Robert

Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alex Salmond and
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*

Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I beg to move amendment No. 248, in page 5, line 2, after '1996', insert

', or such later date as may be appointed by order made by the Secretary of State,'.

The amendment would enable the period during which the regulator is obliged to take account of advice issued by the Secretary of State to be extended by order. It would create some additional flexibility in the process of introducing competitition. I suppose that the Secretary of State's advice cannot be predicted, but it could cover the factors that the regulator will have to take into account in determining his policy on access to the rail network. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport will recall that the Bill, as originally published, did not make provision for the Secretary of State to issue any advice to the regulators.

Clause 4(4)(a), which requires the regulator to take such advice into account until 31 December 1996, was introduced by the Government in Committee. Ministers justified their amendment on the ground that the success of the first round of franchising would depend on franchisees being offered some degree of exclusivity. I presume that the Secretary of State's advice to the regulator will require him to take that objective into account when he considers access agreements between the franchising director and Railtrack. That advice will counterbalance the requirement for the regulator to promote competition, in the light of the Government's acceptance that, at least initially, competition will need to be qualified.

9.15 pm

The amendment is needed if certain eventualities are to be met. First, there is the possibility that the first round of franchises will not have been let by 31 December 1996. It appears that the Bill, as drafted, would not enable the Secretary of State to require the regulator to accept that, beyond that date, competition must be qualified. I wonder whether the Government are confident that potential conflicts between franchising and open access services will have been overcome by that date. Secondly, there is the possibility that, in the light of developments, the Government will come to the same conclusion as the Select Committee—that open access and franchising are not compatible. The Bill does not seem to provide any mechanism to deal with that eventuality.

The amendment would not require the regulator to have regard to advice issued by the Secretary of State beyond 1996; rather, it would provide a degree of additional flexibility for safeguards to be brought into effect if the Secretary of State considered them necessary. Until the franchises are working, it will not be possible to be certain whether, and to what extent, it will be necessary to regulate competition. Clearly, my hon. Friend the Minister believes that some constraints will be needed in the first round of franchises to encourage franchisees to go into the market. That can certainly be achieved through guidance. To set, at this stage, a date governing the regulator's duty to take guidance into account offers an unnecessary hostage to fortune. That is why I move the amendment.

Mr. Freeman: I should like to respond concisely to my hon. Friend, for whose comments I am grateful. He is certainly a doughty supporter of rail interests, not only as a constituency representative but as someone speaking on behalf of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

My hon. Friend was quite right in saying that the purpose of the amendment which was accepted in the Standing Committee was to empower the Secretary of State to give guidance to the regulator for a limited period —up to the end of December 1996. The aim was to make sure that the first franchises were let satisfactorily. That will probably mean what we call moderation of competition, which is the denial of certain open access rights.

I cannot recommend that the amendment be accepted, as it is inevitably a compromise between fettering the independence of the regulator and ensuring that the initial franchising is a success. I think that we have got the balance right.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The system will operate for only 32 months before the clause, as drafted, takes effect. Does the Minister believe that the franchising process will be completed in that time? Everything said so far suggests that the matter will be proceeded with gradually. Although the publication of the franchise maps has taken the process forward a little, it is unlikely that 32 months will be sufficient. Given the Minister's arguments in Committee, increasing flexibility would seem to be entirely sensible.

Mr. Freeman: I appreciate that two and a half years is a relatively short time, but we expect to let a significant number of franchises by then. Completing the pattern for the whole of Great Britain will clearly take considerably longer.

As to the franchises that are let subject to the views of the regulator acting on guidance from the Secretary of State, one is looking at a period of anything up to 10 years after the given date, during which time the franchisee will have some degree of exclusivity. That will almost certainly

[Mr. Freeman]

apply in the case of Network SouthEast services, for operational reasons—because additional services cannot be run into London stations during peak hours. I suspect that it would not be possible at peak hours to thread in open access services.

I cannot commend my hon. Friend's amendment to the House because if we are to encourage the development of open access services that are not under the franchise regime, at some stage they must be given the right to compete for train paths and to challenge for the right to provide rail passenger services.

I probably have not convinced my hon. Friend, but when we drafted the amendment for the Committee stage, we faced a difficult choice as to where the cut-off point would be. If we had extended it to 10 years, that would have stifled independent railway operation. If we had limited it to six or 12 months, that would not have been effective in launching the first round of franchises in this Parliament.

Mr. Gunnell: Does not the Minister accept the Transport Select Committee's view that open access will mean paying a higher subsidy to secure franchisees in the first place?

Mr. Freeman: It is extremely important to get the first franchises off the ground properly. We will learn from experience and, because it will be a gradual, market-led initiative, the franchising director, from his own experience, will undoubtedly modify or amend some of his policies.

We are determined that the first group of franchises will operate successfully and that the quality of services available to the travelling public will improve. The cut-off point is a matter of judgment, but I believe that the Government have got it right and I ask my hon. Friend not to press his amendment to a Division.

We will certainly take on board my hon. Friend's comments on behalf of the AMA about non-statutory guidance to the franchising director and discussions with the regulator. However, the regulator must be independent, and it is most important that after December 1996 he will be able to operate entirely unfettered. Notwithstanding that, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will maintain close contact with the franchising director.

Mr. Waller: I find it difficult to understand why my hon. Friend feels that the regulator would be compromised by the option, in the light of possible future uncertainties, to extend the period during which he can be given advice on a statutory basis and heed that advice. Nevertheless, I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's remarks about non-statutory guidance to the regulator. Given his other assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

GENERAL DUTIES OF THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR

Amendment made: No. 160, in page 6, line 13, leave out 'and' and insert—

'(aa) any payments which the Franchising Director may make with a view to securing—

(i) the provision of any services, or

(ii) the operation of any network, station or light maintenance depot, or any part of a network, station or light maintenance depot,

in pursuance of any provision of sections *(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement)*, 32 to 35 and *(Contracts between the Franchising Director and the Board for the provision of non-franchised railway passenger services)* below; and'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Mr. Freeman: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 6, line 16, at end insert—

'(3) Where the Secretary of State gives the Franchising Director any objectives under subsection (1)(a) above, the Secretary of State shall—

(a) lay a copy of a statement of those objectives before each House of Parliament; and

(b) arrange for copies of that statement to be published in such manner as he may consider appropriate.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 19, page 21, line 5, leave out

'send a copy of the approval'

and insert——

'publish the approval and shall send a copy of it'.

Mr. Freeman: Amendments Nos. 1 and 3 result from a commitment that I gave in Committee. Amendment No. 3 requires the publication of objectives given by the Secretary of State to the franchising director and a commitment to lay before each House a copy of the document. I gave the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) that assurance in Committee.

We intend to recommend that the House accepts amendment No. 1. We shall publish a second draft of the objectives to be given to the franchising director while the Bill is still in Parliament. The first draft was tabled in Committee and we have given a commitment that the House will have an opportunity before the Bill completes all its stages to comment again.

Dr. Marek: I am pleased with the result of our debate in Committee. The Government have tabled amendment No. 3 and the Minister said that they will accept amendment No. 1. I urge my hon. Friends not to vote against amendment No. 3, although it might be their predilection to vote against anything that the Government propose in this Bill, and to support amendment No. 1.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 7

EXEMPTIONS FROM SECTION 6

Mr. Rathbone: I beg to move amendment No. 68, in page 7, line 19, after 'granting' insert 'or refusing'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 69, in page 7, line 21, after 'grant', insert

'or, as the case may be, refuse'.

No. 66, in page 7, line 21, at end insert

'and, if he proposes to grant the licence exemption subject to compliance with any conditions, specifying those conditions.'.

No. 67, in page 7, line 22, after 'grant', insert

'or, as the case may be, refuse'.

No. 64, in page 7, line 23, after

'exemption', insert 'and, if he proposes to grant the licence exemption subject to compliance with any conditions, the reasons why he proposes to impose those conditions.'.

No. 65, in page 7, line 32, after 'grant', insert
'or, as the case may be, refusal'.

No. 62, in clause 8, page 8, line 41, after 'granting', insert 'or refusing'.

No. 63, in page 8, line 43, after 'grant', insert
'or, as the case may be, refuse'.

No. 60, in page 8, line 43, at end insert
'and, if he proposes to grant the licence subject to compliance with any conditions, specifying those conditions'.

No. 61, in page 8, line 44, after 'grant', insert
'or, as the case may be, refuse'.

No. 58, in page 8, line 44, after 'licence', insert
'and, if he proposes to grant the licence subject to compliance with any conditions, the reasons why he proposes to impose those conditions".

No. 59, in page 9, line 9, after 'grant', insert
'or, as the case may be, refusal'.

Government amendment No. 183.

Mr. Rathbone: Earlier we debated the fact that the regulator's role is to promote competition, to prevent abuse of market power and to protect the interests of the consumer, so there seems to be no reason why the amendments to clauses 7 and 8 should not be acceptable in the interests of transparency in the decision-making process.

It is clearly not reasonable that an operator who may have made a significant capital investment in a franchise should be denied the right to know why the regulator has granted, exempted or refused a licence—and therefore the grounds on which to challenge a decision should he wish to do so. In the interests of more open government and more openness generally, I hope that the amendments will be accepted.

Mr. Freeman: Yesterday, in a written answer and a press notice, we announced our policy on exemptions from the regime of licensing and franchising. I hope that the House will welcome the restatement of all the commitments that I gave in Committee in relation to preserved railways, light rapid transit systems and some municipal railways. I say to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) that nothing differs in the statement that we made available yesterday from the commitments that I gave in Committee.

I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) not to press the amendments, which might add a little unnecessary paperwork because only the applicant for a licence exemption or a licence application will be interested in the outcome of the regulator's deliberations. If the regulator gets it wrong, his actions will be open to judicial review.

May I give my hon. Friend one assurance, because in moving the amendments he has helped the House? Before the regulator makes a decision about an application for an exemption, or indeed in granting a licence, informal guidance will be given. We want a user-friendly system to encourage those who will be affected by a licence excemption and those applying for a licence, for example, a preserved railway that wishes to run on the railway system and take paying passengers. I hope that the words which I put on the record in response to the amendment will be helpful to those who might be affected.

9.30 pm

Moreover, where the regulator is minded to refuse a licence exemption, or to refuse a licence applicaton in the first place, I am sure that the regulator will take every trouble to inform those most directly affected. In view of those assurances, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes will not feel it necessary to press the amendment.

Mr. Rathbone: In view of those assurances and the Minister's previous statement, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 8

LICENCES

Amendment made: No. 183, in page 9, line 29, leave out 'the carrying on of different activities' and insert
"a person to be the operator of railway assets of different classes or descriptions.".—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 19

AMENDMENT OF ACCESS AGREEMENTS

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 21, line 5, leave out 'send a copy of the approval'
and insert
'publish the approval and shall send a copy of it'.—*[Dr. Marek.]*

Clause 23

INVITATIONS TO TENDER FOR FRANCHISES

Mr. Harvey: I beg to move amendment No. 185, in page 24, line 28, at end insert—

'(2A) Before preparing such invitation to tender, the Franchising Director shall obtain from the Board, or the body or person already providing services for the carriage of passengers at the time that such services are designated as eligible for provision under franchise agreements—

(i) the historic costs and revenue, the nature and frequency of the service provided, the prices charged for travel by means of those services for the carriage of passengers by railway; and such other incidental and supplementary information as is in the opinion of the Franchising Director necessary to form a true and fair view of the balance between historic costs and revenue;

(ii) the projected costs and revenue, the nature and frequency of the service to be provided, the prices to be charged for travel by means of those services, for the carriage of passengers by railway if they were to be provided, or to continue to be provided otherwise than under the proposed franchise agreement; and such other incidental and supplementary information as is in the opinion of the Franchising Director necessary to form a true and fair view of the balance between the projected costs and revenue (in this part referred to as the "projected balance")

(2B) When issuing an invitation to tender, the Franchising Director shall include in the invitation all the information referred to in paragraph (i) above, but not the information referred to in paragraph (ii) above.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments:

No. 186, in clause 25, page 26, line 18, after '(1)', insert 'Subject to subsection (1A) below:'.

No. 187, in page 26, line 28, at end insert—

'(1A) No franchise agreement shall be entered into if—

(a) in any case where the agreement would be subject to conditions requiring payments to the Franchising Director under paragraph (a) above, any payment to be rendered to the Franchising Director under the agreement would be less than the projected balance; or

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

(b) in any case where the agreement would be subject to conditions requiring payments by the Franchising Director under paragraph (b) above, any payment to be rendered to the franchisee under the agreement would be greater than the projected balance.'.

No. 238, in page 26, line 32 at end insert—

'(2A) A franchise agreement shall include provision requiring the franchisee or franchise operator to provide the Franchising Director with such information as he may reasonably require under subsection (2A) of section 23 above.'.

Mr. Harvey: I respect the fact that the late hour means that I must be brief, but it is a pity that we have reached the amendment at this late stage because my colleagues and I believe that it is important.

Earlier today we debated the circumstances in which the Government might sanction the possibility of the franchising director not granting a franchise and, indeed, allowing British Rail to continue to operate the services. I think that it was the late Lord Macmillan who, with reference to privatisation, coined the expression "selling off the family silver". During earlier privatisations, some people felt that the services being sold were undervalued and there were remarks to the effect that if one put a £10 note up for sale at a fiver, it would find some buyers. However, I think that this is the first privatisation in which there has been any suggestion that the Government might pay people to take the family silver away. The amendment would prevent that.

The amendment builds on what I would call not commitments but agreements in principle, accepted by the Minister in Committee. On 2 March we discussed what information British Rail might make available to the franchising director when he was considering how franchises should be awarded. The Minister said:

"The hon. Member for North Devon says that we are talking of achieved and prospective business plans. When the franchising director comes to consider what British Rail would need to operate the service for the next 12 months or, indeed, for the next 10 years, that is a perfectly reasonable point. I accept the logic of what the hon. Gentleman says —that the franchising director should be able to extrapolate and, indeed, in discussion with British Rail, look at what the costs will be as well as what they have been during the previous six months. I have no difficulty in accepting that". —[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 2 March 1993; c. 503.]

On 4 March, he said:

"On the . . . issue of franchises, we propose that the franchising director should compare the offers received from the private sector with the cost of providing a British Railways Board operated service. I have already agreed with the hon. Member for North Devon that prospective bids should be compared with prospective costs. That was a valuable debate. The franchising director will have to make a judgment based on value-for-money tests."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 4 March 1993; c. 553.]

I deal briefly with the theme of value for money.

The Secretary of State repeated today that if bids were not lower than British Rail operating costs, the possibility of British Rail continuing to operate services could be considered. At a time when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is floating various grisly possibilities about how to attack the budget deficit, it is unacceptable that any franchise should be awarded at a cost to the taxpayer which exceeds the cost of British Rail continuing to operate a service.

The amendment would codify and formalise the circumstances in which the British Rail cost or, as suggested in the amendment, the projected balance between anticipated costs and revenue should be the benchmark against which private sector bidders would have to make their tenders. I hope very much that the Government will be able to accept that notion, given that they have already accepted the component parts.

Mr. Freeman: Perhaps I may bracket amendment No. 238 with amendment No. 185 and say that I find myself in broad agreement with the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey). The House needs to endorse a policy whereby the franchising director can collect a good deal of information from British Rail and, in due course, from franchisees, not only about their historic costs but about their prospective costs. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we shall incorporate the substance of the amendments into the objectives to be given to the franchising director.

The amendments are perfectly sensible, but I caution that there are certain instances in which it is appropriate to disclose prospective costs to private sector bidders. For example, if a line has been electrified British Rail, or a franchisee, will have information about what I hope would be the declining costs of running railway trains along it. It is important that such information be shared in the invitation to tender process. I stand by the commitment that I gave on 2 March. The point made by the hon. Member for North Devon was sensible, because the franchising director must consider prospective costs and extrapolate them in comparing the bids received.

With regard to value for money, I should not like to accept amendment No. 187, or No. 186 which is related to it, because although the point of principle is clear, the franchising director will know what costs British Rail incurs in running a particular service. BR will run a shadow franchise and the costs will be clear. Therefore, when the director considers other offers from the private sector, including management-employee buy-out bids, he must be careful that against the benchmark of British Rail costs he makes a proper judgment of value for money. If he does not, he will be accountable to the Public Accounts Committee through the Comptroller and Auditor General.

There may be some circumstances in which, because of the timing of expenditure, the franchising director needs to take a view, and I would not want to impose on him too inflexible and rigid a system. If the hon. Gentleman is prepared to accept my assurances that I shall take amendments Nos. 185 and 238 on board, perhaps he will respond by not pressing amendments Nos. 186 and 187.

Mr. Harvey: I accept what the Minister says about amendments Nos. 186 and 187 being perhaps too inflexible, and I am grateful to him for his undertaking on amendments Nos. 185 and 238. I accept the need to give some information to bidders, but I ask that it should not be an automatic matter of course that all potential costs are made known to them—only those that the franchising director considers necessary for the purpose of developing the services in question. If we can reach an understanding on that point, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 24

TRANSFER OF FRANCHISE ASSETS OR SHARES TO FRANCHISE OPERATORS, FRANCHISEES ETC.

Amendment made: No. 110, in page 24, line 35, leave out from beginning to end of line 17 on page 26.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 25

OTHER TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF FRANCHISE AGREEMENTS

Amendment made: No. 111, in page 26, line 33, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) Without prejudice to the generality of the provisions relating to property, rights and liabilities that may be included in a franchise agreement, a franchise agreement may include provision requiring the franchise operator—

(a) to acquire from such person as may be specified in the franchise agreement, and to use, such property or rights as may be so specified; or

(b) to undertake such liabilities as may be so specified.

(3A) A franchise agreement may include provisions with respect to the fares to be charged to persons using the franchised services.

(3B) Subject to any requirements imposed by or under this Act, a franchise agreement may contain any such provisions as the Franchising Director may think fit.'.

No. 112, in page 26, line 41, leave out

'in consequence of any such conditions'

and insert

', or for the making of any other payment, in consequence of any condition or other provision of a franchise agreement'.

—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 26

FAILURE TO AWARD FRANCHISE AGREEMENT

Amendment made: No. 113, in page 26, line 43, leave out from beginning to end of line 40 on page 27.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 29

PASSENGER TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES AND EXECUTIVES: FRANCHISING

Amendment made: No. 114, in page 33, line 22, leave out '26' and insert

'(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement),.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Clause 32

PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE NON-FRANCHISED ETC. PASSENGER SERVICES

Amendment made: No. 115, in page 36, line 31, leave out 'by or'.—*[Mr. Freeman.]*

Mrs. Ewing: I beg to move amendment No. 232, in page 36, line 39, leave out 'three' and insert 'six'.

I assure hon. Members that in speaking to the amendment in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Mon (Mr. Jones) and myself, I do not intend to detain the House nor to press the amendment to a Division.

Clause 32 defines

"Proposals to discontinue non-franchised . . . passenger services"

and gives a clear signal that

"the service operator shall give notice of the proposal"

of a closure

"to the Franchising Director not less than three months before the date specified".

The amendment is not ideological; it relates to the practicalities of life, so I hope that the Government will be able to exercise some flexibility in responding to me. Three months may seem a substantial time in terms of giving notice and allowing a consultation period. However, decisions often coincide with holiday periods. In Scotland, for example, an announcement may be made in June; July and August tend to be our holiday period so it is difficult for organisations to get together to discuss the decision and to reach any formalised conclusion. The same would happen if an announcement were made in November because December and January are months when people may not be on holiday but when they are very much involved with their families over Christmas, new year and Burns night.

I seek an element of flexibility. The three-month period should not be adhered to rigidly. I hope that the Government will give special consideration to a demand clearly expressed by the local community that the three-month period should be extended.

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): The hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) was kind enough to say that she did not intend to press the amendment. I understand the importance of the issue she has raised. Amendment No. 232 would require operators of the non-franchised passenger services to give, as she said, six months' notice rather than three months' notice. It is the franchising director who is under a duty to secure the continued provision of the service until the regulator decides on the merits of the closure proposal.

There are two issues here. The first is whether three months or six months is the appropriate period in which to give notice to the franchising director so that he can consider whether he should secure a replacement service. Our view has been that three months is an adequate time for that process to take place because it is not subject to the holiday considerations that the hon. Member for Moray mentioned.

If we were to rely only on the three months—if that were the sole determinant of the time available between notice of closure and closure being effected—the hon. Lady would have a perfectly fair point when she says that the time is inadequate. I emphasise that the point at issue is that the required period of notice being three months or six months has no bearing on whether a service continues to be available to passengers. The operator may not discontinue the service until the expiry of the notice period. From that expiry, the franchising director is under a duty to secure the continued provision of the service until the regulator has come to a decision on the closure proposal.

If we extended the amount of notice that the franchising director has from the operator, it would merely eat into the time that the regulator took to consider the closure proposal. How reasonable it was to make the period three, four, five, six or more months would be a matter of commercial judgment. It is fair to say that to keep the figure of three months is not to erect an unreasonable barrier to entry into franchised services. However, I reassure the hon. Lady that the important point is that the period of three months is not a truncated period after which the regulator will give his decision. He will take

[Mr. Steve Norris]

whatever time he needs. The franchising director is under an obligation to procure the continuance of the service if the operator, having given notice, then terminates the service. I hope that, with that assurance, the hon. Lady will withdraw the amendment.

Mrs. Ewing: As the Minister has said that the three-month limit will not be applied rigidly, especially as it relates to the regulator, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendments made: No. 116, in page 37, line 21, leave out 'provide, or'.

No. 117, in page 37, line 42, leave out 'provide, or'.

No. 121, in page 38, line 5, leave out 'continue to provide or'.

No. 119, in page 38, line 36, leave out 'by or'.

No. 120, in page 38, line 39, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) section *(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement)* above,'.

No. 118, in page 38, leave out line 42 and insert—

'to secure the provision of the service.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 33

PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE FRANCHISED ETC. PASSENGER SERVICES

Amendments made: No. 122, in page 39, line 4, leave out 'by or'.

No. 125, in page 40, line 6, leave out 'provide, or'.

No. 123, in page 40, line 12, leave out 'continue to provide or'

No. 124, in page 40, line 40, leave out 'by or'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 34

NOTIFICATION OF PROPOSALS TO CLOSE OPERATIONAL PASSENGER NETWORKS

Amendment made: No. 126, in page 41, line 48, at end insert—

'and shall be under a duty during the interim period to secure the operation of the network or, as the case may be, the part of the network to which the proposed closure relates.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Mr. Norris: I beg to move amendment No. 127, in page 42, line 4, at end insert—

'(6A) Without prejudice to any subsequent application of this section in relation to the network or the part of the network in question—

(a) if the final decision on the closure question is that the proposed closure will not be allowed to take effect, the Franchising Director shall be under a duty to secure the operation of the network or, as the case may be, the part of the network after the interim period; and

(b) if the final decision on the closure question is that the proposed closure will be allowed to take effect subject to compliance with conditions, the Franchising Director shall be under a duty to comply with those conditions or to secure that they are complied with.'.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss also Government amendments Nos. 129, 128, 131 to 138, 144, 139 to 143, 145, 152, 146, 147, 149 to 151, 159, 154 to 158, 161 and 163.

Mr. Norris: This is a miscellany of amendments to clauses 32 to 41, which provide for the new closure procedures. They either fulfil commitments that were given in Standing Committee or are drafting inconsequentials.

To deal with the amendments that fulfil the commitments given in Committee, it was suggested that the requirement in clause 36 that the consultative committees must act in accordance with any directions given by the regulator was inappropriate. The House knows that it was never our intention that the regulator should be able to prevent a consultative committee from holding a public hearing when investigating a proposed closure. However, I can understand how clause 36(4)(b) might be interpreted in that way. To rectify that concern, amendment No. 134 deals with that requirement.

Amendment No. 138, which amends clause 39, ensures that any revocation or variation of a condition to a closure consent is published. It is sensible that any decision to vary or revoke conditions attached to a closure should be communicated to all those who received notification of the original decision and it should be displayed in all the stations in the area affected.

The other amendments deal with the experimental services provided for in clause 41. The House is aware that they are, effectively, technical and consequential. The key amendments are amendments Nos. 151 and 155. In the interests of time, I will not go into detail on those unless the House wishes me to do so. I hope that I have assured the House that the amendments are consequential and technical.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 129, in page 42, line 7, at end insert—

'"the final decision on the closure question" means—

(a) in a case where the decision of the Regulator under section 36(7) below with respect to the proposed closure is not referred to the Secretary of State under section 37 below, that decision; or

(b) in a case where that decision is referred to the Secretary of State under section 37 below, the disposal of that reference by the Secretary of State;

"the interim period" means the period beginning with the date mentioned in subsection (5)(b) above and ending four weeks after the date of the final decision on the closure question;'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 35

NOTIFICATION OF PROPOSALS TO CLOSE RAILWAY FACILITIES USED IN CONNECTION WITH PASSENGER SERVICES

Amendments made: No. 128, in page 42, line 42, leave out 'person' and insert' operator'.

No. 130, in page 43, line 25, at end insert—

'and shall be under a duty during the interim period to secure the operation of the relevant facility or, as the case may be, the part of the relevant facility to which the proposed closure relates.'.

No. 131, in page 43, line 29, at end insert—

'(6A) Without prejudice to any subsequent application of this section in relation to the relevant facility or the part of the relevant facility in question—

(a) if the final decision on the closure question is that the proposed closure will not be allowed to take effect, the Franchising Director shall be under a duty to secure the operation of the relevant facility or, as the case may be, the part of the relevant facility after the interim period; and

(b) if the final decision on the closure question is that the proposed closure will be allowed to take effect subject to compliance with conditions, the Franchising Director shall be under a duty to comply with those conditions or to secure that they are complied with.'.

No. 132, in page 43, line 36, at end insert—

"the final decision on the closure question" means—

(a) in a case where the decision of the Regulator under section 36(7) below with respect to the proposed closure is not referred to the Secretary of State under section 37 below, that decision; or

(b) in a case where that decision is referred to the Secretary of State under section 37 below, the disposal of that reference by the Secretary of State;

"the interim period" means the period beginning with the date mentioned in subsection (5)(b) above and ending four weeks after the date of the final decision on the closure question;'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 36

NOTIFICATION TO, AND FUNCTIONS OF, THE REGULATOR AND THE RELEVANT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

Amendments made: No. 133, in page 44, line 24, after 'opinion' insert

', on the basis of the information available to it,'.

No. 134, in page 44, line 33, leave out from 'Regulator' to end of line 34.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 37

REFERENCE TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF DECISIONS OF THE REGULATOR CONCERNING PROPOSED CLOSURES

Amendments made: No. 135, in page 46, line 10, at end insert—

'but this subsection is without prejudice to any subsequent proposal for closure.'.

No. 136, in page 46, line 18, leave out first 'the' and insert 'any'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 39

VARIATION OF CLOSURE CONDITIONS

Amendments made: No. 137, in page 46, line 39, after 'closure' insert

', other than a condition requiring the Franchising Director to secure the provision of a bus substitution service (within the meaning of sections 119 to 124 of the Transport Act 1985),'.

No. 138, in page 46, line 42, at end insert—

'(1A) Where, in exercise of his power under subsection (1) above, the Regulator decides to vary or revoke any closure condition, he shall send a copy of his decision to—

(a) the Secretary of State,

(b) the Franchising Director,

(c) every consultative committee whose area consists of or includes the whole or any part of the area affected by the closure to which the condition relates, and

(d) either—

(i) if the closure in question is one falling within section 32 above, the service operator, within the meaning of that section, or

(ii) if the closure in question is one falling within section 34 or 35 above, the operator of the network, station or light maintenance depot in question who gave the notice required by subsection (1) of the section in question,

and shall publish notice of the decision at every station within the area affected by the closure to which the condition relates.'.

No. 144, in page 47, line 4, after 'section' insert—

'" the area affected", in relation to any closure, shall be construed in accordance with the section under or by virtue of which the Franchising Director was required to publish in connection with that closure the notice referred to in section 36(1) above;'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 40

BUS SUBSTITUTION SERVICES, ETC.

Amendments made: No. 139, in page 47, line 15, leave out from 'discontinued' to end of line 16.

No. 140, in page 47, line 21, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

'(b) as if any reference to the imposition of a condition by the Secretary of State were a reference to the imposition of a closure condition under this Part by the Secretary of State or the Regulator;'.

No. 141, in page 47, line 29, after 'State' insert

'(other than a reference to the imposition of a condition by him)'.

No. 142, in page 47, line 32, leave out '35 or 36 above; and' and insert

'36(7) or 37(2) above;

(bb) in subsection (1)(a) of section 119, the words "by the Board" shall be treated as omitted; and'.

No. 143, in page 47, line 40, after 'committee' insert 'established under subsection (2) of section 2 of the Railways Act 1993 or, in relation to the Greater London area, within the meaning of that section, the London Regional Passengers' Committee;'.

No. 145, in page 47, line 43, at end insert—

'(bb) subsection (3) shall be disregarded;'.

No. 152, in page 48, line 5, leave out '35 or 36' and insert '32 or 33'.

No. 153, in page 48, line 6, after '27' insert

'*(Transfers of franchise assets and shares)* and *(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement)*'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 41

EXPERIMENTAL RAILWAY PASSENGER SERVICES

Amendments made: No. 146, in page 48, line 19, at end insert

'on any line or from any station'.

No. 147, in page 48, line 21, after 'service' insert 'on any line or from any station'.

No. 148, in page 48, line 25, leave out 'neither to provide that service nor' and insert 'not'.

No. 149, in page 48, line 28, after 'service' insert 'on any line or from any station'.

No. 150, in page 48, line 35, after 'weeks' insert 'in a local newspaper circulating in the area affected and'.

No. 151, page 48, line 38, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

'(5) In this section "experimental passenger service", in relation to any line or station, means a railway passenger service on that line or from that station which is designated by the Franchising Director as experimental and which either—

(a) was so designated before its introduction; or

(b) before being designated under this section as experimental, was at some time provided on an experimental basis, within the meaning of section 56A of the Transport Act 1962.'.

No. 159, in page 49, line 2, after 'weeks' insert 'in a local newspaper circulating in the area affected and'.

No. 154, in page 49, line 11, after 'experimental' insert '(a)'.

No. 155, in page 49, line 14, at end insert 'but

(b) if the service is one which has been provided on an experimental basis, within the meaning of section 56A

of the Transport Act 1962, every period during which it was so provided, or during which the provisions of that section had effect in relation to it by virtue of subsection (9A)(b) below, shall be counted as a period during which the service was designated as experimental.

(9A) Where, immediately before the coming into force of section 42(1) below so far as relating to section 56A of the Transport Act 1962 (proposals to discontinue services provided on an experimental basis), a railway passenger service is being provided on an experimental basis within the meaning of the said section 56A—

(a) none of the following provisions, that is to say, sections 32 and 33 above, section 42(2) and (3) below and Schedule 4 to this Act, shall have effect in relation to that service until such time as a franchise agreement is entered into in respect of that service or in respect of some or all of the other railway passenger services provided in the area in which, or on the line on which, that service is provided; and

(b) the provisions of the said section 56A shall continue to have effect with respect to that service—

(i) until the time mentioned in paragraph (a) above, or

(ii) until the service becomes an experimental passenger service under this section,

whichever first occurs.'.

No. 156, in page 49, line 15, after 'section' insert—

'"the area affected", in relation to an experimental service on any line or from any station, means the area in which is situated the line or, as the case may be, the station in question.'.

No. 157, in page 49, line 16, leave out 'under' and insert 'in satisfaction of requirements imposed by'.

No. 158, in page 49, line 18, leave out 'under' and insert 'in satisfaction of requirements imposed by'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 56

RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATOR AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF FAIR TRADING, AND FUNCTIONS OF THE MONOPOLIES COMMISSION

Amendments made: No. 4, in page 62, line 31, leave out 'commercial activities connected with' and insert 'the supply of'.

No. 5, in page 64, line 1, leave out subsection (10).—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 60

KEEPING OF REGISTER BY THE REGULATOR

Amendment made: No. 161, in page 66, line 34, leave out '41(1)' and insert '41(2) or (3)'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 61

KEEPING OF REGISTER BY THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR

Amendments made: No. 162, in page 67, line 28, at end insert—

'and, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (c) above, "amendment" in that paragraph includes any variation of the property, rights and liabilities which from time to time constitute the franchise assets in relation to the franchise agreement in question, whether the variation is effected in accordance with the terms of, or by an amendment made to, the franchise agreement.'.

No. 6, in page 67, line 31, leave out 'section 59(2)(a) and (b) above' and insert

'paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 59(2) above, for this purpose taking references in those paragraphs to the Regulator as references to the Franchising Director.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 62

ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS OF THE REGULATOR

Amendment proposed: No. 7, in page 68, line 9, after 'shall' insert 'include'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Mr. Harvey: In the Standing Committee, I moved an amendment standing in my name and that of members of the all-party disablement group. At that time the Minister agreed to accept the amendment in principle and come back with a reworking of it. As yet, I have not seen any sign of any such amendment. The Minister specifically said that he would reflect on how to give effect to the meaning of the amendment. It may be that he is still reflecting on it. Is it his intention to table an amendment in another place? I shall be pleased to hear about that.

Mr. Freeman: Amendment No. 7 fulfils the commitment that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) but, more specifically, the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey).

If the hon. Member is not satisfied that we have fulfilled our commitment in connection with the disabled, perhaps he will communicate with me. I give an undertaking that then we shall consider the matter in another place. The matter should not be controversial. Clear commitments were given that in the annual report of the regulator reference would be made to not only the employment of disabled people but facilities for them.

Mr. Harvey: The Minister may be confused about the subject matter. The amendment to which I referred dealt with a code of practice governing facilities for passengers on the railways. It did not cover employment. It dealt with how the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee was to be involved in communication with the regulator. Welcome as the string of amendments are, they do not deal with that subject.

Mr. Freeman: I certainly recollect that commitment. The hon. Gentleman is right: it is not covered by amendment Nos. 7 to 11. I assure him that we shall return to the subject in another place. We have not yet reached the right conclusion. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman tomorrow.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I do not seek a commitment from my hon. Friend the Minister, but will he consider asking the chairman of the advisory committee to provide an open letter to the Secretary of State giving the views of the committee on the position in the Bill as it appears to the committee?

Mr. Freeman: We have already received an opinion from the previous chairman. I shall write to the present chairman and ask him to write to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on that point.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 68, line 10, leave out 'include'.

No. 9, in page 68, line 12, at end insert—

(aa) general surveys of any developments during that year which relate to—

(i) the provision of railway passenger services or station services for, or the use of such services by, persons who are disabled; or

(ii) the employment by licence holders of persons who are disabled;'.

No. 10, in page 68, line 13, leave out 'set' and insert 'a statement setting'.

No. 11, in page 68, line 15, leave out 'include'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 63

ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR

Amendment made: No. 12, in page 69, line 7, leave out 'section 59(2)(a) and (b) above' and insert

'paragraphs (a) and (b) of section 59(2) above, for this purpose taking references in those paragraphs to the Regulator as references to the Franchising Director.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 65

GENERAL DUTIES OF CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES

Amendment made: No. 163, in page 71, line 28, leave out '35 to 41 above' and insert

'32 to 41 above or Schedule 4 to this Act.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 68

POWER OF THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR TO REQUIRE INFORMATION FROM THE BOARD AND ITS WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARIES

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 74, leave out lines 22 to 37.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 71

MEANING OF "RAILWAY SERVICES" ETC

Amendment proposed: No. 14, in page 77, line 44, at end insert

'and references to carrying, or to the carriage of, passengers by railway shall be construed accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 15, 16, 167, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 83 and 108.

Dr. Marek: Will the Minister say something about amendment No. 14? I have been looking out for the implementation of the car parking provisions. I wonder whether this group of amendments contains an amendment on that subject. That may be the case. If so, I apologise to the Minister.

There is a problem with car parking, certainly in the London area. It is feared that franchisees will use railway car parks for purposes other than car parking. Can the Minister help me on that matter?

Mr. Norris: I remember well the debates that we had in Committee on that point. The amendments make it clear that the term "station services" includes car parking. That means, for example, that where the clause 4 powers impose a duty on the regulator to protect the interests of users of railway services, that includes station services. That duty would include protecting the interests of the users of the car parks at stations.

To that extent, the amendment provides the hon. Gentleman with the reassurance that he seeks. He and I debated on a previous occasion the effect of planning law on surplus assets. That is perhaps more relevant to the point that the hon. Gentleman wanted to make. I have been advised that amendment No. 14 addresses the point that he made in Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 77, line 46, at end insert—

'and, for the purposes of the above definitions of "network services" and "station services", where a person permits another to use any land or other property comprised in a network or station he shall be regarded as providing a service which falls within the meaning of "network services" or "station services", as the case may be.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 72

INTERPRETATION OF PART I

Amendments made: No. 166, in page 79, line 17, leave out '24(4)' and insert—

(Transfers of franchise assets and shares) (8)'.

No. 164, in page 79, leave out lines 20 and 21.

No. 165, in page 79, leave out lines 31 and 32.

No. 16, in page 80, leave out lines 1 and 2 and insert—

'"locomotive" means any railway vehicle which has the capacity for self-propulsion (whether or not the power by which it operates is derived from a source external to the vehicle);'.

No. 167, in page 80, leave out lines 3 and 4.

No. 17, in page 80, line 8, after 'with' insert

'any of the track comprised in'.

No. 18, in page 80, leave out lines 10 to 12 and insert—

'together constituting a system of track and other installations which is used for and in connection with the support, guidance and operation of trains carrying passengers or goods.'.

No. 19, in page 80, line 45, at end insert—

'"railway vehicle" includes anything which, whether or not it is constructed or adapted to carry any person or load, is constructed or adapted to run on flanged wheels over or along track;'.

No. 20, in page 81, leave out lines 25 to 27 and insert—

'"train" means—

(a) two or more items of rolling stock coupled together, at least one of which is a locomotive; or

(b) a locomotive not coupled to any other rolling stock;

"vehicle" includes railway vehicle.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 73

POWERS OF THE BOARD TO FORM COMPANIES

Amendment made: No. 168, in page 81, line 47, after '31' insert

'(Transfers of franchise assets and shares) and *(Failure to secure subsequent franchise agreement)'*.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 74

POWERS OF THE BOARD TO MAKE TRANSFER SCHEMES

Amendments made: No. 169, in page 82, leave out lines 28 and 29 and insert—

'(d) the Franchising Director, or

(e) any company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director,'.

No. 170, in page 82, line 30, at end insert 'or to a franchise company.'.

No. 171, in page 83, leave out lines 1 to 3 and insert—

'(c) for the purpose of effecting any transfer contemplated by section *'(Transfers of franchise assets and shares)* above,'.

No. 172, in page 83, line 26, leave out subsection (7).

No. 174, in page 83, line 39, leave out from beginning to end of line 6 on page 84 and insert—

'(9) In this Part, "franchise company" means any body corporate which is, or is to be, the franchisee or the franchise operator under a franchise agreement.'.

Clause 75

TRANSFER TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE OR THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR OF THE BOARD'S FUNCTION OF MAKING TRANSFER SCHEMES

Amendment made: No. 21, in page 84, line 20, leave out 'a franchise company or the Regulator;'
and insert
'or a franchise company;'.

Clause 76

TRANSFERS OF SHARES OF CERTAIN COMPANIES: PROVISIONS SUPPLEMENTAL TO SECTIONS 73 TO 75

Amendments made: No. 179, in page 85, line 9, leave out 'or a franchise company'.

No. 177, in page 85, line 10, leave out 'or franchise company'.

No. 178, in page 85, line 13, leave out
'neither the Board nor any nominee of the Board'
and insert
'none of the following persons, that is to say, the Board, any wholly owned subsidiary of the Board or any person acting on behalf of the Board or its wholly owned subsidiaries,'.

No. 176, in page 85, leave out lines 20 and 21 and insert—

'(5) None of the following persons, that is to say, the Franchising Director, any company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director or any person acting on behalf of the Franchising Director or any such company, shall dispose of any shares of a company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director except—'.

No. 175, in page 85, leave out line 37 and insert
'by the Franchising Director, any company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director or any person acting on behalf of the Franchising Director or any such company.'.
—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 83

POWER OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE OR THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR TO REQUIRE PROVISION OF INFORMATION IN CONNECTION WITH TRANSFER SCHEMES

Amendments made: No. 180, in page 90, line 22, after 'functions', insert
'conferred on him by section *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes)* above or'.

No. 181, in page 90, line 33, leave out 'and any franchise company' and insert
'any franchise company and any company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 84

FUNCTIONS OF SECRETARY OF STATE IN RELATION TO TRANSFER SCHEMES

Amendment made: No. 182, in page 91, line 34, leave out from 'scheme' to 'unless' in line 37 and insert
'made by the Board or the Franchising Director, otherwise than under section *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes)* above, shall not come into force'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 85

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISIONS AS TO TRANSFERS BY TRANSFER SCHEME

Amendment made: No. 184, in page 92, line 6, leave out 'section 74(6)' and insert
'sections 74(6) and *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes) (4)*'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 97

GRANTS TO THE BOARD

Amendments made: No. 39, in page 99, line 33, at beginning insert '(a)'.

No 40, in page 99, line 33, at end inset 'or
(b) without prejudice to paragraph (a) of this subsection, for the purpose of enabling that Board to make any payment (whether by way of repayment of principal or payment of interest or of any other description) in respect of any loan made to them under section twenty of this Act.'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 99

EXTINGUISHMENT OF CERTAIN LIABILITIES OF THE BOARD

Amendment made: No. 41, in page 100, leave out lines 14 to 19.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 101

TAXATION PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 70, in page 100, line 31, leave out 'taxation' and insert
'stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 103

THE SECRETARY OF STATE, THE FRANCHISING DIRECTOR AND THE BOARD NOT TO BE REGARDED AS SHADOW DIRECTORS OF CERTAIN RAILWAY COMPANIES ETC.

Amendments made: No. 71, in page 101, line 35, at end insert—
'(aa) any company which is wholly owned by the Franchising Director;'.

No. 72, in page 102, line 11, after '74(6)' insert
'or, as the case may be, *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes)*(5)(b)'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 109

RAILWAY HERITAGE

Mr. Bayley: I beg to move amendment No. 48, in page 106, line 14, after 'Board', insert 'or any franchise operator'.

Madam Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendment No. 22.

No. 49, in page 106, line 17, after 'subsidiary', insert 'or the franchise operator'.

No. 50, in page 106, line 24, after 'Board', insert 'or any franchise operator'.

No. 51, in page 106, line 26, after first 'Board', insert 'or any franchise operator'.

No. 52, in page 106, line 29, after 'subsidiary', insert 'or franchise operator'.

No. 53, in page 106, line 34, after first 'Board', insert 'or any franchise operator'.

No. 54, in page 106, line 36, after 'subsidiary', insert 'or franchise operator'.

No. 55, in page 106, line 37, at end insert—

'—provided that

(i) the Public Record Offices and the National Railway Museum shall be given priority of claim on records and artefacts originating in or presently held by the public sector and that the National Railway Museum shall be given priority of claim on records and artefacts created by franchise operators; and

(ii) Transfers of records and artefacts to the Public Record Offices and the National Railway Museum shall be without consideration.'.

Mr. Bayley: One day, everything set in place by this Bill will be history. All the privatised trains and rolling stock will have reached the end of their useful life and will be scrapped. Under section 144 of the Transport Act 1968, the National Railway museum has the right to claim, at no cost, redundant railway equipment, and although the Bill brings in a similar provision for public sector railway companies, it makes no similar provision for the equipment of private sector railway companies. This group of amendments seeks to do that.

The Government say that they intend to move as quickly as they can from a regime of publicly owned railways to one of privately owned railways. If the National Railway museum is to remain a major excellent repository for our country's railway heritage, there must be provision for it to claim redundant railway equipment from private sector operators. We are talking about redundant equipment that has reached the end of its useful life and has only a scrap value. I urge the Government to think again on this point.

Mr. Freeman: I will not commend this group of amendments to the House, but I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that the Government want the National Railway museum in York, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, to thrive and prosper.

It is quite right that there should be controls over British Rail and public sector assets, but I believe that assets acquired by the private sector should be negotiated for acquisition by the museum, and there should be no compulsion.

However, I give the hon. Gentleman and all those interested in the National Railway museum—who included, of course, the late Robert Adley—the assurance that the Department will work closely with the trustees and the director of that museum to make sure that it is a proper and fitting tribute to the railway system.

I hope that, with those assurances, the hon. Gentleman will not press the amendment.

Mr. Bayley: I will not press the amendment, in view of the Minister's statement.

Madam Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman withdrawing the amendment? Will he make it quite clear?

Mr. Bayley: I am, Madam Speaker.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 22, in page 106, line 15, after 'artefact' insert

'which it owns and which is'.—*[Mr. Arbuthnot.]*

Clause 118

GRANTS AND SUBSIDIES

Amendments made: No. 73, in page 112, line 45, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State shall be the competent authority of Great Britain, in relation to persons who operate services for the carriage of goods by railway, for the purposes of the public service obligations regulations.'.

No. 77, in page 113, line 3, leave out 'and'.

No. 79, in page 113, line 5, at end insert

'and

(d) to the extent specified in subsection (3A) below—

(i) every non-metropolitan county or district council in England or in Wales and every regional or islands council in Scotland, and

(ii) every London borough council and the Common Council of the City of London,'.

No. 74, in page 113, leave out line 11 and insert 'railway passenger services'.

No. 75, in page 113, line 17, at end insert—

'(3A) For the purposes of subsection (2) above—

(a) a council falling within paragraph (d)(i) of that subsection shall only be the competent authority in relation to those railway passenger services whose provision the council secures under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 (passenger transport in areas other than passenger transport areas); and

(b) a council falling within paragraph (d)(ii) of that subsection shall only be the competent authority in relation to those railway passenger services in respect of which the council enters into and carries out agreements under section 59 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984 (provision of extra transport services in London).'.

No. 76, in page 113, line 21, leave out 'services for the carriage of passengers by railway' and insert 'railway passenger services'.

No. 78, in page 113, line 36, leave out subsection (7) and insert—

'(7) A statutory instrument containing an order under subsection (6) above shall not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before and approved by a resolution of the House of Commons.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 130

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 83, in page 120, line 8, at end insert—

' "the Monopolies Commission" means the Monopolies and Mergers Commission;'.

No. 80, in page 120, line 24, after '74' insert

'or *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes)*'.

No. 81, in page 120, line 28, leave out from 'when' to end of line 32 and insert

'it has no members other than—

(a) the Secretary of State, the Franchising Director or a Government department,

(b) a company which is itself wholly owned by the Crown, or

(c) a person acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, the Franchising Director, a Government department or such a company.'

No. 82, in page 120, line 32, at end insert—

'(2A) For the purposes of this Act, a company shall be regarded as "wholly owned by the Franchising Director" at any time when it has no members other than—

(a) the Franchising Director,

(b) a company which is itself wholly owned by the Franchising Director, or

(c) a person acting on behalf of the Franchising Director or such a company.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Clause 132

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 121, line 23, after '129,' insert *'(Crown application)'*.

No. 84, in page 121, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) section *(power to make consequential modifications in other Acts etc.);*'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Schedule 1

THE REGULATOR AND THE FRANCHISE DIRECTOR

Amendments made: No. 85, in page 122, line 38, after '(b)' insert

'except as otherwise provided by this Act,'.

No. 86, in page 122, line 40, after '(c)' insert

'expect as otherwise provided by this Act,'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Schedule 7

TRANSFERS BY TRANSFER SCHEME

Amendments made: No. 87, in page 141, line 6, after 'where' insert '(a)'

No. 88, in page 141, line 8, at end insert 'and

(b) the transfer scheme in question is made otherwise than under section *(Powers of the Franchising Director to make transfer schemes)* of this Act.'.

No. 24, in page 142, line 47, leave out 'it' and insert 'he'.

No. 25, in page 144, line 6, leave out 'itself' and insert 'himself'.

No. 26, in page 146, line 17, leave out 'it' and insert 'he'.

No. 27, in page 146, line 19, leave out first 'it' and insert 'him'.

No. 28, in page 146, line 19, leave out second 'it' and insert 'he'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Schedule 8

TAXATION PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 89, in page 146, line 27, leave out from beginning to end of line 27 on page 155.

No. 90, in page 155, line 29, leave out 'this Part of'.

No. 91, in page 155, line 31, leave out 'has the same meaning as in Part I of this Schedule' and insert

'means a transfer scheme, if and to the extent that it provides for the transfer of property, rights or liabilities from a body or person falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (e) of section 74(1) of this Act to another such body or person.'.

No. 92, in page 155, line 32, leave out 'this Part of'.

No. 93, in page 155, line 42, leave out '(a)'.

No. 94, in page 155, line 44, leave out 'or'.

No. 95, in page 155, line 45, leave out '(b)' and insert—

'(2A) Stamp duty shall not be chargeable on any instrument or agreement which is certified to the Inland Revenue by the Secretary of State—

(a) as made'.

No. 105, in page 156, line 3, at end insert 'and

(b) as operating in favour of no person who does not fall within paragraphs (a) to (e) of section 74(1) of this Act.'.

No. 97, in page 156, line 10, leave out sub-paragraph (4).

No. 98, in page 156, line 17, leave out 'to (4)' and insert '(2), (2A) and (3)'.

No. 99, in page 156, line 23, at end insert—

'(6) Section 12 of the Finance Act 1895 (collection of stamp duty in cases of property vested by Act or purchased under statutory power) shall not operate to require—

(a) the delivery to the Inland Revenue of a copy of this Act, or

(b) the payment of stamp duty under that section on any copy of this Act,

and shall not apply in relation to any instrument on which, by virtue of the preceding provisions of this paragraph, stamp duty is not chargeable.'.

No. 100, in page 156, line 25, leave out 'No agreement' and insert

'An agreement to transfer chargeable securities, as defined in section 99 of the Finance Act 1986, to a person falling within paragraphs (a) to (e) of section 74(1) of this Act shall not give rise to a charge to stamp duty reserve tax if the agreement is'.

No. 101, in page 156, line 26, leave out 'by'.

No. 102, in page 156, line 27, after '(a)' insert 'by'.

No. 103, in page 156, line 28, after '(b)' insert 'by'.

No. 104, in page 156, line 30, after '(c)' insert 'by'.

No. 96, in page 156, leave out lines 31 to 39 and insert—

'(2) An agreement shall not give rise to a charge to stamp duty reserve tax if the agreement is made in pursuance of Schedule 7 to this Act in connection with a restructuring scheme made as mentioned in paragraph (a), (b) or (c) of sub-paragraph (1) above.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Schedule 13

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 108, in page 175, line 26, column 3, at end insert 'Sections 69, 70 and 71.'.—*[Mr. Norris.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's Consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]

9.59 pm

Mr. MacGregor: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

There is widespread agreement in the country that we should make better use of our railways. That is reflected in the report of the Select Committee on Transport to which we made a positive response last week. The Bill provides us with the opportunity to take forward our reforms which will ensure that the improvements in British Rail in recent years—I have constantly paid tribute to the management, the staff and the board for those improvements—are advanced further. I am confident that the new structure contained in the Bill will be very much to the benefit of passenger services, passengers, freight and employees on the railway.

The Government's policy was first set out in a White Paper last July. The detail of that policy has since been developed in a series of consultative documents and policy statements issued during the passage of the Bill. In addition, a long series of debates took place in Standing Committee and, as a result of points of view expressed there, a considerable number of amendments have been made on Report. That demonstrates that we have been listening and have been determined to ensure that, concomitant——

It being Ten o'clock, further proceedings stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Railways Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. MacGregor: Concomitant with our policy and objectives, we are prepared to make changes where we think that the case has been made out. I should like to pay a particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport for all that he has done on the Bill and to my hon. Friends who have supported him.

Throughout the process, our policy and the principles underlying it have remained clear and consistent. We believe that the best future for the railways lies in involving the private sector in their operation and management to the maximum possible extent.

There is no reason why railways should be denied the benefits that the injection of private sector initiative and discipline and the approaches of the private sector have brought other industries. However, the railways are special and the involvement of the private sector in the railways requires new and imaginative solutions.

Our proposals for franchising passenger services are an example of that. Yesterday, I announced our plans for restructuring the remainder of British Rail's passenger services. We had already announced the first seven franchises and yesterday I announced a further 18; the services will be organised into 25 separate groups to provide the basis for transferring the provision of all British Rail's passenger railway services to the private sector. The groups are based on the need to reflect operational common sense, to produce packages that will be attractive to bidders and to bring back a sense of local and regional identity, and, I hope, a sense of pride in the railways.

I repeat what I said earlier today, in view of some of the slightly misleading comments that were made this morning on those 25 franchises. They are not all happening at once or in the near future. It is a gradual process of development of the franchises to make sure that we proceed in a way that makes the policy work properly operationally and does not cause any problems in the process.

Mr. Dykes: That presumably means that my right hon. Friend categorically accepts the principles in paragraph 537 of the report of the Select Committee on Transport which makes similar suggestions.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not have paragraph 537 in front of me, but it is another way in which we have worked with the Select Committee. We have based the division of the franchises very much along the lines that the Select Committee requires.

Our proposals are also pragmatic. The Government are fully aware of the importance of the industry to our country and to the economy. We cannot and will not take risks with the railways; hence our firm commitments to maintaining the network and to continuing public subsidy for socially necessary services and our commitments to rigorous closure procedures and safeguards to ensure continuity of services.

The Opposition have tried to misrepresent our policies, stirring up unjustified concerns among passengers, employees in the industry and pensioners. There is no better example than pensioners. The proposals we announced last week demonstrate just how unfounded those concerns were.

Our policy for the railways is also realistic. There is no magical solution to the structural decline that the railways have suffered since the 1930s, but the Government are firmly committed to ensuring that the railways get the best possible opportunity to make the most of their advantages. That is clear in respect of freight.

We all know that there is a big challenge if the railways are to increase the amount of freight they carry and to halt the decline from rail to road. I elaborated some of the problems yesterday, but I believe that the establishment of the three new geographically based companies out of British Rail's existing trainload freight and contract services offers the prospect of an innovative, competitive freight railway in the private sector, combined with the other policies of open access and the various subsidy arrangements that I announced on Second Reading. In the last two days, we have not had much time to dwell on the issue of freight, but I believe that our policies undoubtedly offer the best way forward in that respect for the railways.

The Bill will enable us to deliver all those policies. It is now ready to go to another place. It has been carefully examined and extensively debated in more than 100 hours of consideration in Standing Committee, and I commend it to the House.

10.5 pm

Mr. Prescott: The Bill has absolutely nothing to do with improving facilities for passengers. It has nothing to do with reintroducing pride into the railway system. It certainly has nothing to do with common sense. It has everything to do with the ideological obsession of the Government to change the ownership of British Rail from a publicly owned facility meeting public needs to a privately owned company concerned with private greed.

The Government have made it clear during the 100 hours of discussion, and in our last two days of debate, that they do not see the Bill as having anything to do with competition. The idea that changing ownership will bring about competition and introduce an entrepreneurial climate through a privatised culture has been exploded in all our debates. It has nothing to do with competition. It has only to do with the replacement of a public monopoly with a private monopoly.

Nor has the Bill anything to do with the market deciding fares, taking account of what the market can provide—the principle of the market philosophy—because the Secretary of State made it clear today that all fares will be controlled by a regulator. Clearly, the market philosophy cannot apply in those circumstances.

The changes that have taken place—there have been many—have come about because the Government have realised that the Bill is impractical in the running of a railway system. So much is that the case that one of the first and major changes to be made by the Secretary of State was to ensure that, up to December 1996, the powers of the regulator and the franchise operators and directors shall be subjected to the right hon. Gentleman's control.

In other words, the right hon. Gentleman is imposing political control over and above the bodies that he is setting up to see that competitive forces play a part in the railways. They will not play such a part and he knows it. Indeed, if the regulator took action to defend his position in relation to his powers in the Bill, the Secretary of State could overrule him. So the right hon. Gentleman has taken out a form of insurance. I assume that that will not be the present Secretary of State, who will be in his current job for only a short time longer. If he moves to the Treasury

[Mr. Prescott]

and does the job as well there as he has done at the Department of Transport, heaven help us. The mess will continue.

I have not witnessed in my 20 years in the House a Bill that has been so unanimously opposed by so many bodies, which have made their views known in many articles. Passenger boards and consumer groups have made clear their unhappiness with the Bill. Potential bidders for the operation, freight and passenger services, have moved away from offering their services and have said that it is not a good Bill from their point of view.

The employees have shown that the conditions that will apply to them and the redundancies that will affect them are unacceptable. Although the right hon. Gentleman has spoken of improved pensions, many of my hon. Friends and others believe that it is still one of the main intentions of the Bill to secure the possibility of pinching the £4 billion of assets remaining in the pension funds.

Consumer bodies have sent copies of their views to hon. Members in all parts of the House explaining the ways in which they are not happy with the Bill. Members of the Select Committee on Transport, representative of both sides, under the distinguished chairmanship of the late Mr. Robert Adley, expressed their view that the Bill will not achieve its declared aim of producing a better railway system.

The final absurdity must be hearing the Secretary of State confirm his ideological prejudice which will not allow him to permit British Rail to bid for franchises, even though it has the expertise to do so. He accepts that British Rail will still be the operator if private operators do not take up the services—good old BR will have to step in and do that. But, unlike the nationally owned Swedish system, BR will not be able to bid for franchise operations.

It is absurd to agree to the French rail system bidding for the franchise operations here, but that is what the Secretary of State has done. It is a publicly owned body with all the characteristics that the right hon. Gentleman dislikes. This is quite unacceptable and I should have expected the Secretary of State to think so, too.

I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman was happy about the French buying into our water and power systems; now the same will happen to the railways. Why is he so prejudiced against British operations and British ownership? The only possible advantage is that Britain might now obtain the French TGV—it is a far better train than the ones that we have, because BR has been starved of the funds necessary to maintain an adequate system.

This Bill and its effects were best summed up by Sir Peter Parker, the former chairman of British Rail, in *The Guardian*. Having read the Bill and our debates, he said, describing the kind of railway system that we are now to inherit:

> "Potential operators will not 'own' the service but have a short-term franchise. Their timetable will be specified by the franchise director, track charges and train paths will be determined by Railtrack; their trains will be owned by a leasing company while fares will be controlled. The driver, signalman and platelayer will work for separate companies. I used to talk of the age of the train, but we are moving into the age of the origami railway."

We are talking about running a rail system in bits and pieces. It cannot produce the integrated service which will be essential for the 21st century. Such a service is also essential to reduce congestion and minimise environmental damage.

The one saving grace of this major change and splitting up of assets is that it will be easier for us to return the railway system to a publicly owned, publicly accountable system. Polls have shown that 71 per cent. of the public would prefer that to the ideas of the Secretary of State. We shall return the railways system to that state and I tell all potential bidders to bear that possibility in mind when they bid for their short-term franchises.

10.12 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I suppose that there are two main reasons why the Government have found it difficult to achieve unanimity on this issue. First, although it is complicated and detailed, this is an enabling Bill, and many issues remain to be resolved outside the framework of the legislation.

Secondly, moving into a new era for the railways, we have to ask ourselves a great many questions about how the future will turn out. People seek guarantees; they want to know whether things will stay the same as they have known them. It is difficult to answer such questions.

Inevitably, the Select Committee report was sceptical about whether the new system will work. Not everyone will be satisfied until it has been seen to work. The test ultimately is whether the system will fit together more coherently than the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is prepared to admit.

One of the great arguments has been about whether the relationship between the franchisees and Railtrack is the right one. That is still to be determined by the contractual arrangements and the exact terms of the franchises. It remains to be seen whether many people will want to run the railways. I believe, on the evidence, that they will. That will be the test; if no one comes forward, the Government will have been shown to be wrong and British Rail will still exist. But I believe it likely that bidders will present themselves and offer us a better prospect for the railways.

I believe that the competition that the Government want will be secured by the obtaining of franchises rather than by on-rail competition. I have learnt from the Select Committee investigation that on-rail competition offers few opportunities. I think that the Government would do better to banish the idea that there will be much on-rail competition in the new era, thus putting in place the very best franchise arrangements—arrangements that will instil the greatest confidence in the continued successful operation of the railways.

Much will depend on the extent of investment in the railways. The Government have been frank: they have made it clear that they recognise the need for the public sector to provide investment for major capital infrastructure. That is indeed important. The question is, to what extent will the new arrangements enable extra cash to be advanced? I believe that there is room for manoeuvre, and that the railways will receive more money and become more efficient.

The Opposition have accused us of dogmatism. I hope that many Conservatives believe in private enterprise: I hope that they believe that private management produces better ideas, leading to more efficient running of the

railways. I also hope that these proposals will show that belief to be true, as other Government proposals have done.

10.15 pm

Mr. Cryer: The Secretary of State described the Bill as a measure whose aim was to achieve a better use of British Rail. That is ironic: if there is one measure designed to undermine British Rail and, in so doing, undermine a national network of passenger services, it is this appalling legislation, which is a recipe for bureaucracy. There will be a franchising director, a regulator and hundreds of people engaged in producing the thousands of contracts which even the Department of Transport acknowledges will be necessary to implement the Bill. Energy will be devoted not to the production of a better railway system, but to the production of a crazy system of franchising and contracting. When companies go into liquidation, passengers will know what has happened, because the trains will cease to run: that, at least, can be guaranteed.

A national network, built up over the years by a dedicated work force, is being eroded. InterCity will be broken up into franchises. The Bill is a kick in the teeth for the thousands of men and women who have striven to provide a decent public service, despite Government cuts and the deep, inbuilt prejudices of Ministers—including those in the Cabinet—against publicly owned services.

The Secretary of State talked of a sense of local or regional identity. The passenger transport authorities, working with British Rail, are already dealing with that. In west Yorkshire, the PTA—which has some sort of democratic accountability—already provides an excellent supplement to services and an excellent sense of local identity. The only difficulties experienced there result from the Government's hamfisted approach.

The Secretary of State talked of freight haemorrhaging away from British Rail and pouring on to the roads. It is hardly surprising that that should be happening, with the present Secretary of State and the present Minister of State in charge of road transport. The Bill will increase the flow of traffic away from rail and on to the road, at the very time when most sensible people recognise that the transport of both people and freight should be moving in the opposite direction.

One clear message emerges from the Bill: everyone who votes for it will be voting to sabotage our national railway network.

10.19 pm

Mr. Rathbone: The House, those listening to the debate at this late hour and those who will read about it tomorrow will be struck by the disgraceful, backward-looking, depressing speeches that we have just heard on Third Reading from Opposition Members. It is tragic that after all the debate that has taken place and all the actions of the Government, particularly their decisions and promises over the last two days, the Opposition cannot even pay lip service to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister have done.

I put on record the thanks of my hon. Friends to the Secretary of State and to the Minister for their hours of listening, their positive reactions and their guarantees so that the Bill goes from this House to the other place in a much better state than at the beginning of the debate yesterday.

I wish to raise three minor points. First, may I ask for reassurance from my right hon. Friend that where it is appropriate vertical integration of rolling stock and infrastructure will be allowed under the franchise system? Secondly, can he please give us some indication of the Government's attitude towards the future funding of British Rail, since British Rail itself will remain responsible for quite a large proportion—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order and listen to the hon. Gentleman who has the floor. Conversation may take place, but quietly, so that the hon. Gentleman may be heard. That includes hon. Ladies.

Mr. Rathbone: Opposition Members do not wish to hear. They did not want to listen to any of the debate over the last two days, so their behaviour now is not reprehensible.

I was asking for reassurance on the Government's intentions as to finance being available for British Rail in the interim until all the franchises have been let because a considerable amount of the rail network will remain the responsibility of British Rail in the meantime.

Thirdly, in deference to our late colleague, Robert Adley, I ask once again for reassurance from the Secretary of State or the Minister that British Rail's heritage, particularly the museum in York, will be looked after as part of the new responsibilities of the Heritage Department.

With those three points, I commend the Bill to the House and to the country.

10.22 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The real issue is how the railways can be competitive with the roads. I think that the House understands that that will be determined by the level of capital investment available to the railways this year, next year and the year after. With the legislation there is little prospect of the private sector bringing in substantial extra funds for three years. I hope that the Government will continue to be flexible in their approach. We have seen in the report of the Select Committee the drop in capital investment over the past two or three years. That needs to be put right fast. The same flexibility as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister have shown during the passage of the Bill needs to be applied by the Treasury so that the Government can achieve the real aim of a lower subsidy and higher capital investment.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) said about Robert Adley. When the Secretary of State said that the Government agreed with four fifths of the report of the Select Committee, that was a tribute to Robert Adley for drawing together the range of opinion within the Select Committee.

The House expects to see further improvements to the Bill in another place, including the incorporation of some of the commitments given to my hon. Friends who have properly raised important issues. Hon. Members who are keen to get the Third Reading over so that they can drive home should realise that the Bill is dedicated to those who use the railways.

10.24 pm

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that, even at this late hour, we have all enjoyed the hustings for the chairmanship of the Select Committee on Transport. The legislation with which the Bill is most commonly compared is the Act that introduced the poll tax. There are two reasons for that: first, the intellectual absurdity of the whole exercise, which no serious commentator is prepared to support; secondly, the particularly pertinent fact, of which I give Conservative Members notice, that the legislation will not be the end of the process after which they can keep their heads down and hope that nobody will notice who was responsible for it. We are at the start of a debate that will go on in the country until the general election, as the effects of the legislation become known. That is the reality and that is the similarity. The more that is known of the legislation, the more it will be opposed.

From this day, and especially from the day on which the Bill becomes law—if it does become law—there will be one piece of good news for British Rail. BR will cease to be the whipping-boy for everything that happens on the railways, as it will no longer be responsible. The people who will be responsible for every cut, every fare increase, every breakdown and every loss of service are those who are putting this reckless legislation in place. Every community that depends on the railways understands that.

Notwithstanding the retreats in response to views expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, what we have heard today and what we heard in Committee will guarantee a regime of higher fares, fewer services, an intrinsically less safe railway and massive job losses. All this will have been brought about by a piece of legislation that the public have not asked for and already deeply oppose.

The battle to save our railways will continue. The people who will be held responsible for their fate are Conservative Members, who are putting the Whip before the railway communities.

10.26 pm

Mr. Freeman: This Bill will certainly improve the quality and quantity of railway services. By the time of the next election, we shall be happy to stand on our record of improvement. The attitude of the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) throughout the proceedings has been entirely negative. We are happy to stand on our record and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 292.

Division No. 283] **[10.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(Cambs SW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence L.
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith

Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Milligan, Stephen
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon. Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M. *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Andrew MacKay.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F.
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Dr. Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyce, Jimmy
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*

Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Michael *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Rt Hon John *(M'kl'da E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D. *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has Madam Speaker received a request for a statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Secretary of State for Scotland, both of whom are represented here tonight, following the blockade of the fisheries protection vessel Morven in Girvan harbour by Girvan fishermen who are understandably frustrated by the effect of the tie-up scheme and want the Government to reconsider it urgently? Can we have a statement tomorrow, if not tonight, on this very important matter?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I can report that Madam Speaker has received no such request.

Wool Prices

10.42 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move,

That the British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1184), dated 29th April 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

I shall deal briefly with the five issues that arise from the statutory instrument: the need for the statutory instrument, the impact on farm incomes, farm welfare, the wool textile industry and the role of the British wool marketing board. They will encompass most of the worries that are likely to be expressed in the House.

The statutory instrument itself is necessary because of the relatively late passage of the Agriculture Bill. The Bill provides for the abolition of the financial guarantee. We had hoped that it would be given Royal Assent by the end of April, before the start of the new clip year. As the House will know, the Bill was "Maastruck" or "Maastricken", whichever is the past participle of Maastricht. The Bill now provides for the end of the guarantee at Royal Assent, whenever that is given.

The statutory instrument revokes the requirement for Ministers to fix annually a guaranteed price for wool. It does not pre-empt the Bill where the substantive issue of the legislative existence of the guarantee is considered. It merely ensures that there will be no rate fixed for this year. That is the constitutional position.

As for farm incomes, it was never the aim of the wool guarantee to offer long-term support to farmers. It was designed to achieve price stabilisation. In the 1960s and 1970s the guarantee provided 10 to 15 per cent. of a sheep farmer's income, but the figure now is less than 5 per cent. The reason for that, of course, is the development of European Community schemes that have pushed money to all producers of sheep, via the ewe premium, and especially to upland producers, via the combination of the ewe premium, the special supplement for upland sheep and the hill livestock compensatory allowances. This year, the support through the ewe premium has been amplified by the currency changes and the depreciation of the pound. The sheep annual premium, plus the HLCAs, is worth £495 million to sheep producers in the United Kingdom —and that is against a background of much healthier prices for the commodity itself. One must not forget that getting a price from the marketplace is as important as receiving a subsidy.

The ending of the guarantee will therefore have a minimal effect on farm incomes. The welfare argument is that farmers will not shear their sheep, but the fact is that in the United Kingdom sheep are reared for meat. The farmer will get his ewe premium, plus his HLCA—farmers in the uplands receive more than £30—and the value of the quota, which is the value of the right to keep the sheep. The few sales that have taken place suggest that that represents a substantial capital value. The farmer will also get the value of the crop of lambs produced by the ewes. In order to qualify for that support and that benefit from the market, a sheep has to be both alive and healthy. If it is not, the farmer will not receive the benefits, so it is not in his economic interest to allow the welfare of the sheep to deteriorate.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Has my hon. Friend examined the problem in the very high hills? I have received a letter on that subject from an extremely prominent farmer in the Lake District—he is a good farmer, too. As my hon. Friend will know, the only sheep that will survive on the very high hills are the Herdwick and the Swaledale, especially the Herdwick. The farmer tells me that, without the guarantee, the value of the wool would pay only 50 per cent. of the cost of shearing and handling the wool. There is a real danger that some farmers on the very high hills—not the good farmers, but those who are in serious difficulties—may be tempted not to incur the expense of shearing the sheep and handling the wool.

Will my hon. Friend give some thought to the possibility of introducing a further order allowing the present system for the Herdwick and the high hill Swaledale sheep to continue for a further year, because of the severe difficulties that the order will cause farmers on the very high hills? Perhaps he would be kind enough to write to me.

Mr. Curry: I hear what my right hon. Friend says, but he would be the first to recognise that farmers on the very high hills—albeit that they farm Herdwicks—receive significant sums in support. If those sheep are not kept alive and healthy, the support will diminish. It is true, and I acknowledge the fact, that shearing and the other forms of wool production, taken separately from the production of meat and the other purposes of rearing, are non-remunerative activities, because of what has happened on the world market. However, the substance of my case is that that should be set against the value that the farmer receives both from direct support and from the value of the product. Herdwicks now command quite good prices in some continental marketplaces, because of the excellence of their meat, and the wool has become a more marginal factor in the overall value of the commodity to the farmer. Of course I shall write to my right hon. Friend, but he will understand that in promising to do so I cannot make a commitment at the Dispatch Box.

I do not believe that it will be in any farmer's interests not to shear his sheep, even leaving aside any consideration of his preoccupation with welfare. In the worst circumstances—I accept that this would be in the worst circumstances for some maverick farmers—under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968, it is an offence to cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to livestock and a schedule of penalties is set out.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is this perhaps not the most ideal time at which to introduce the order when there is a huge overhang of wool on the world market?

Mr. Curry: There is a huge overhang of wool on the world market. It would take a sage or a very unwise prophet to forecast when that overhang will disappear. If I were looking for an argument for saying that it was a propitious time, I should argue, first, that there has been a significant increase in Community-directed support to farmers and, secondly, that the depreciation of the pound has added an unlooked-for supplement to that, which has been a bonus—*[Interruption.]* Let us say the truth. It has been a bonus to farmers. They have benefited directly from it. Market prices have been far more buoyant after a long period in which they were very depressed. In those

[Mr. Curry]

circumstances, recognising that wool is a marginal part of the income of sheep farmers, it is not a bad time at which to be doing this.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Minister seems to be saying that if there had not been the devaluation of sterling he would not be introducing the measure. Is that the case?

Has the Minister any conception of the resentment that his policies are provoking in the interest groups and industries that he is meant to promote? As we have heard, fishermen are being pushed into blockading because of the Minister's policies. Why does he think that he is causing so much resentment among the people who work in the industries for which he is responsible? What is it about his policies or his attitude that is causing so much chaos in farming and in fishing?

Mr. Curry: That is a pretty pathetic intervention. If I am causing resentment among sheep farmers by directing £30·55 in ewe premium, its supplements and the HLCAs to farmers in the most difficult conditions in Britain, I have yet to hear about it. If I have caused resentment even by this measure, I have yet to hear comments from my constituents. I have not had a single letter from my constituency, which is one of the main sheep-producing areas in the country, telling me that this measure is not sensible. The wool marketing board may have thought that there was something fundamentally wrong, but Mr. Alun Evans has not arrived on my doorstep to make representations to me. The hon. Gentleman should have one small star for trying hard, but he needs to try a great deal harder before he gets off early from class.

I am extremely alive to the concerns of the wool textile industry. The industry says that if the farmer shears the sheep, he will either chuck the fleece over the fence or he will sell it away from the board. I recognise that that is a concern. First, let me make it clear that the board keeps its statutory powers as a buyer. Many people have not recognised the fact that we have decided to keep those statutory powers. The board buys and grades the wool, which is an essential job. It does that before selling to the textile industry. That is the difference between it and a body such as the milk marketing board, which buys a raw material and sells it on as lightly transformed, if transformed at all, raw material.

Producers are required to sell to the board. Any farmer selling to anyone other than the board is selling illegally and is subject to action against him by the board, which is enforceable through civil law. The penalty is the fine of the recovery of half the value of the wool sold. The only wool that is not covered by the board is wool that comes from animals that have been slaughtered in slaughterhouses. That remains the case.

The order merely removes the fixing of the guarantee. The only thing that the Agriculture Bill will do, when it eventually becomes law, will be to remove the existence of a guarantee. The statutory power, the obligation to sell through the board and the board's functions remain in place. There is clearly a need for rationalisation and for restructuring if there are gains in efficiency. The board has had management consultancy studies and it has made certain proposals as a consequence. We should have liked to able in the Bill to give the board some assistance by allowing it to appoint non-executive directors and to widen the scope of its directors. However, those measures were ruled to be outside the scope of the Bill.

We are still ready to give the board all the assistance that we can to address its new situation. I have constant contact with Mr. Alun Evans—we have a strong and sensible working relationship. He recognises that the board is able to face the new challenges and the new situation and that we gave a warning four years ago that this would happen. This has not been sprung on the industry. It has not jumped fully armed from the councils of Government. Four years ago, we gave a warning about it and it has been accepted by the industry.

The position of the industry has changed. The essential support for farmers comes not from wool but from the European Community and the marketplace. That is especially true of the hills, which are strongly represented in my constituency. From the point of view of the farmers and customers, the decision that we have taken should be implemented so that people know where they stand. It is right and necessary and I commend the order to the House.

10.55 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): We have heard a most unconvincing speech from the Minister. His responses to Conservative Members were less than satisfactory. This is a shabby and sad little order which arises out of a grubby little deal that was done between Treasury Ministers and Agriculture Ministers. Agriculture Ministers needed money to fund the further development and expansion of environmentally sensitive areas and have taken money away from the wool guarantee.

At no stage was the effect of this order properly measured on, first, domestic wool production and exports from the United Kingdom; secondly, employment in the wool processing industry in the United Kingdom; thirdly, the balance of payments; fourthly, the maintenance of quality standards of wool in the United Kingdom; and fifthly, and most importantly, the whole question of animal welfare. I shall go into animal welfare in detail this evening.

The wool industry is to be Gummered or, as they say in the slaughtering industry, effectively knackered because that is what will happen to it in the coming years. Let me explain what the problem is, in case the Minister does not understand. At present, the guaranteed price for wool is 117p per kilo. The farmers' share of that is 90p per kilo and the rest goes to the wool board to cover marketing, handling and storage costs. For nearly 40 years, the price of wool has rarely been below the guaranteed price. Until 1989, the overall cost to the taxpayer was almost nothing. Indeed, in 1988, the industry felt so confident about its future that it was prepared to accept the phasing out of the guarantee. In 1990, the international wool market totally collapsed. The effect of the collapse was to trigger the Government's guarantee with a taxpayer contribution and the price paid to the farmer was maintained at 96p per kilo in the 1989-90 year. Let there be no doubt in the minds of hon. Members that, if the guarantee is abolished tonight, the price to the farmer will drop from more than 90p per kilo to only 40p per kilo. That is the difference to the farmer.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): If the hon. Gentleman is right, it is a difference of 50p per kilo. How many kilos are there in an average fleece? What is the price of lamb this year compared with the price last year?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: There are 2 kilos in an average fleece and the price of lamb this year is higher than last year. The critical question is: will low-paid sheep farmers continue to shear their sheep? What are the consequences of failing to shear? The answer is that some sheep farmers will no longer shear because they will say that it is no longer profitable. Indeed, it will be unprofitable. What is the evidence for that?

Average shearing costs are 27·5p per kilo. The British wool marketing board's calculations show that for certain breeds—the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to this—the costs incurred in shearing sheep will exceed the price received for the wool when it is sold to the board. In the case of Swaledales and dark and light Herdwicks, farmers will lose money if they shear. In the case of Herdwicks, they will lose 50p per animal. Several other breeds are on the margin of profitability.

So what are the consequences of a reduction in the wool clip? I have here a letter from a company called D. B. Holdsworth Ltd., which will be known to Ministers as one of the most important wool merchants in the United Kingdom. What it says about the consequences on jobs of the reduction in the clip is interesting:

"In the scouring and combing sectors, there are some 2,500 jobs which are directly at risk. Approximately 50 to 55 per cent. of the British wool clip is exported direct—largely in this form. There are a further 21,000 jobs in wool textiles, which would also be directly affected, mainly in carpet spinning . . . Any reduction in the British wool clip would undoubtedly result in the increase, by importation, of wools from overseas —mainly New Zealand. Value added at present to British wool which is in the form of yarn and cloth would be lost."

On marketing the company says:

"Prior to the advent of the British Wool Marketing Board, there were 270 merchants collecting wool. The clip was badly graded,"—

a function of the British wool marketing board, as the Minister said—

"or not graded at all. Contamination and damage was prevalent and wool left on the farm (in some cases for years)."

Are Ministers prepared to accept that we should go back to the bad old days before the introduction of the wool guarantee?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman persists in debating as if farmers produced sheep for wool and nothing else. But he knows that that is not true. Farmers produce sheep for meat and the wool is a by-product of that. Therefore, even though the shearing of the wool might not be economic in present circumstances, it is still in the farmer's interest to keep his animals healthy and alive because he receives a large degree of support for them. What is more, he receives a good market price for them. It is entirely counter-productive and self-destructive for the farmer not to shear his sheep. It is not an isolated sector. It is part of the production of that animal.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister is right. Yes, the farmer will get his price on the market. But the point is that the incentive to shear is lost. If he believes that he can still get the price on the market without shearing, he will proceed to do so.

Mr. Marlow: Has the hon. Gentleman ever kept sheep? If he kept sheep, would he shear them or not?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Of course I would shear them. But I remember a Conservative Member of Parliament who could not even look after his sheep and was taken to court and prosecuted. He paid £1,000 in court costs and £1,500 in fines. So let us not talk about constituency of approach by people in the United Kingdom on such matters.

The issue of jobs was referred to by D. B. Holdsworth Ltd. Let us consider the position in the Minister's constituency. In Skipton and Ripon two large companies are involved in wool processing. One is Hayfield Textiles, which has 235 full-time employees. It is a large user of British wool in its spinning processes. It has several thousand customers in the United Kingdom and it exports British wool products all over the world. It has markets for British wool in the United States of America, Scandinavia, the far east, Australia and Japan. Their export markets are threatened by any reduction in the clip. Indeed, the introduction of a new product line using naturally coloured wool from hardy varieties—the very varieties to which the hon. Gentleman was referring—is directly threatened as the clip will no longer be profitable to shear.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman is doing farmers a grave injustice. I do not know a single farmer who would allow his sheep to suffer by not being sheared. None of the ones round my way would allow that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I hope that the hon. Lady is right, as indeed does the whole House. But the reality is that some farmers will not shear. We will wait and see what happens and when it happens I will be able to draw it to the attention of the hon. Lady.

Another company, Gaskell Carpets, in the Minister's contituency employs 50 full-time staff to make a 100 per cent. British wool product, a very fine product indeed. It produces only from British wool and I argue that its supplies are at risk if there is any reduction in the clip.

Does the Minister wish to contest what I am saying?

Mr. Curry: Yes, absolutely; I contest it totally. The hon. Gentleman has not taken into consideration the fact that sheep numbers in the United Kingdom are a great deal higher than they were four or five years ago. Even if what he forecasts were to happen, we have still got more sheep and would still get a bigger clip than we did four or five years ago. But it will not happen.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister consulted firms in his constituency? If so, what was the result of the consultation? What did they say when he asked them what their views were about the ending of this arrangement? Did they express concern? Does he want me to give way again?

Mr. Curry: If they have such concerns, they see me in my surgery or write to me.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: A £700 million export business in the United Kingdom is threatened as a result of the withdrawal. I am not saying that it will be destroyed, but it will be undermined. The continuity of supply of British wool, particularly certain varieties, to British wool processors will be affected.

Mr. Jopling: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is my neighbour in the Lake District, but

[Mr. Jopling]

he is getting on to a rather bad point. I would guess that the firms that he is mentioning will be laughing all the way to the bank as a result of this order, because it will mean that the wool clip will remain much the same as it has been. All farmers will do as he said that they would do—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). They will continue to clip their sheep whether or not it is profitable. That will mean that the firms to which he referred will have a bonanza, because they will get nearly the same amount of wool, but much cheaper. So they will make big profits.

I wish that the hon. Gentleman would confine his remarks to the farmers, because they are the ones who will lose out on this.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Gentleman would do well to consult the National Farmers Union in Cumbria, because it agrees with what I am saying. His constituency is covered by that branch of the NFU.

If the trade implications are damaging, the animal welfare implications are appalling. I have a very interesting letter here from an organisation called the National Office of Animal Health Ltd. I understand that this organisation is the trade association of the animal medicines industry. This is what it has to say on the whole question of shearing:

"We are extremely concerned about press speculation that, due to the low price of wool, farmers will be tempted not to shear their sheep this summer. This prospect offers a considerable threat to the welfare of individual sheep and the health of the nation's flock."

Ministers gasp when I read this. It is not me speaking, it is not the Labour party speaking, it is the National Office of Animal Health which specialises in these matters and is dealing with medicines in this area.

The letter continues:

"failure to remove the wool creates a number of serious problems. Sheep, particularly in rough terrain, can be 'cast', falling and unable to rise, because of the weight of the fleece eventually resulting in starvation and death. The presence of a heavy . . . fleece in hot summers can cause direct stress to the sheep. The fleece as it becomes old, dirty and matted, forms an ideal habitat for a wide range of external parasites which can infest the fleece and burrow into the animals flesh. Blow fly, lice and keds can all flourish. Apart from regular dipping, shearing offers the best protection against summer parasite attack. Parasite attack can damage the hide as well as the fleece . . . Sheep scab, sadly no longer a notifiable disease in Great Britain, has exploded throughout the British sheep population. The British Leather Confederation report 10 per cent. of hides showing evidence of scab attack . . . Not only does shearing remove the cover under which scab and other parasites can operate, but the act of gathering in flocks and shearing means that every sheep has a thorough inspection every year. Furthermore, the presence of an old, matted fleece prevents proper penetration of dip".

Ministers and Government Back Benchers may laugh, but that is the view expressed.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: No. The hon. Gentleman is a potato producer and does not rear sheep.

That is the view of the animal welfare lobby, the trade association to the animal medicines industry, the British Wool Federation and a number of other bodies which regard themselves as experts. The only people who do not agree with the argument are Ministers, who do not want to fork out taxpayers' money to maintain the guarantee into the future. *[Interruption.]* It may well be a good enough position for Ministers, but we are concerned about the implications for jobs, for exports and for animal welfare.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I promise that I will give way on the amendment to the Agriculture Bill, if it is selected, in three weeks' time when we are discussing the wool guarantee.

Finally, let me say a few words about the wool marketing board. It recognised that the writing was on the wall in 1988 when it accepted the principle of the guarantee being phased out. It undertook a major rationalisation pre-empting what is about to happen. It cut its marketing, grading, advertising and promotion costs. It reduced its work force by 30 per cent. and the number of depots from 29 to 22 over a three-year period. It generated a capital reserve of £10 million which, unfortunately, was not sufficient to see it through a very difficult period with a huge overhang in the international wool market, a major overhang certainly in Australia where 4 million bales of wool which cannot be sold are gathering dust. It pleaded with the Government for a phased period for the withdrawal of the guarantee, first over a three-year period, then over a two-year period. Next week I shall plead on behalf of the wool marketing board for a one-year period on the back of a particular amendment, if it is selected.

When the board failed in all those areas, it came back to ask for Government support with marketing costs for wool because there are problems bringing wool in from marginal producers in parts of Scotland and Wales, and smaller producers are worried because in the new circumstances it will be difficult to fund the collection of wool. It has received no response or help from the Government. It has made every effort in the matter and it is clear, from what the Minister said and from the comments of the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) and others, that there is concern in the north of England about the way in which it has been treated.

The industry should be helped, not punished. I invite hon. Members in all parts of the House to vote against the measure in protection of the British wool industry.

11.15 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): We may have somewhat differing views about the order. As chairman of the all-party wool textile group, it would be remiss of me not to put forward some views.

The Minister will recall that when I spoke about the guaranteed wool price and other issues on Second Reading of the Agriculture Bill *[Lords]* on 23 March last I made certain statements. I make no apology for reiterating them tonight. As I recall, he was not listening too well when I adduced them originally, although he assured me that he read the *Official Report* of my speech later.

I said that one aspect of the Bill would have a serious effect on the wool industry and producers and would, in turn, affect our textile industry. The main purpose of the guaranteed price has been to give stability to wool producers and, as we have heard, it has done that for over 40 years. The cost to Government has been very small and that stability continued until world wool prices collapsed in 1990. As I said on Second Reading:

"The stability created by the guaranteed price has allowed the British wool clip to improve in quality and image, and turn itself into an internationally recognised fibre. There are licensees all over the world, and there is representation in Japan, which is now one of the biggest consumers of British wool. The existence of the guranteed price has helped to develop an efficient structure for the collection, distribution and promotion of British wool. That structure is the envy of many European countries and it was the basis of the system now operating in South Africa. The guaranteed price has served producers in the less-favoured and remote areas of this country particularly well".

There is concern in the board about collecting small parcels of clip in remote areas. It is thought that it will not be profitable for collection under the new system. I said:

"The existence of the guaranteed price has been of great value in preserving the environment and countryside".—[*Official Report*, 23 March 1993; Vol. 221, c. 830.]

So we are not talking about the industry.

I listened carefully to the Minister saying how well off sheep farmers were. Undoubtedly, those on hill farms, particularly in his constituency, which I know well, are receiving lots of money. But a sheep farmer who I know in Bedfordshire tells me that he receives less for a whole lamb, plus its fleece, than I pay for a leg of lamb at the butchers. That is a difficult argument to defend.

Mr. Curry: I do not want to quarrel with my hon. Friend. I did not say that sheep farmers were very well off. I said that there was a significant flow of Community support to them, that the quota was bringing a capital value and that the value of cropping the lambs was significantly better than it had been for a number of years. I accept that it is from a low base. I simply say that the trend has been positive and we are grateful that that is the case because it needed to be positive after what happened in previous years.

Mrs. Peacock: I accept that the trend is more positive than it has been, but my hon. Friend will recall that I asked him for an assurance on Second Reading that the issue would be examined thoroughly in Committee. When I read the *Official Report* of the Committee proceedings for the morning of 11 May, when the matter was discussed, I was sorry to note that only the hon. Members for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and the Minster took part. That was not much of a discussion.

At about the time when that discussion was taking place, hon. Members were receiving letters from Donald Holdsworth of D. B. Holdsworth. He is the chairman of the British Wool Federation and he wrote to several hon. Members as follows:

"We agreed to the ending of the guaranteed price in 1988 but since then the picture has changed dramatically (which could not possibly have been envisaged . . .) We are convinced that it is in the interests of both producers and the Wool Textile Industry to have the guaranteed price phased out over three years rather than ended so abruptly in these difficult circumstances."

So it was agreed, in better times, that the guaranteed price should be phased out; the chairman merely asks for a reconsideration now.

The situation—the world glut, the marketing of wool, and the circumstances facing those who depend on their wool cheque—has changed dramatically. I insist that some farmers need their wool cheque, just as they need the money from milk and meat. I ask the Minister carefully to consider the changes that have occurred. To say that a handful of farmers may be producing wool, but most are producing meat, and wool is a by-product of that industry I suggest is insulting to many of our wool farmers——

Mr. Curry: It was a pure statement of fact. How can my hon. Friend possibly deny it? Most production, in hills and lowland, is of meat. Wool is a by-product. Good luck to farmers: I hope that they make as much money as they can from this, but it is not their main source of income.

Mrs. Peacock: I hear what the Minister says, but to suggest that only a handful of farmers have an interest in wool is an insult to those who do have such an interest. They have supported much of our wool textile industry. Their wool may not go into our fine cloth, because we import the wool for that, but it certainly goes into our carpet yarn. The Minister may know more about sheep than I do, but I certainly know a little more than he does about carpet yarn. He might allow hon. Members some knowledge of industries. I may not chase sheep around the hills, but I do know a little about this subject.

I hope that the Minister will tell us how he sees the future not just of sheep on the hills, but of our wool textile industry, which is very important to many areas of the country.

11.22 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock), but I should like to take her argument a stage further.

There is no immediate pressure to remove this guarantee. We do not have to do it because of the European Community. We are not forced into it by the GATT negotiations. It is entirely down to the Minister's timetable and the Minister's motives.

Still less is there any pressure from the industry. The British Wool Federation and the board agreed that in due course it might be desirable to remove the guarantee. That was agreed in 1988 when, as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said, there was a rough equilibrium in the world market—hence, the transition would have been easy. Not so today, when the amount paid to producers would be halved. The Minister says that his farmers are cheerful at the prospect, but I notice that a large number of Conservative Members look far from cheerful. I suspect that that has as much to do with the timing as with the order itself.

The question that the board and the federation are asking is: why now? Why no transition? Why no two or three-year transitional period? What is the hurry? Clause 50 of the Agriculture Bill provides for the Minister to take the necessary steps to abolish the guaranteed price. Why do we have to jump ahead of that? Why, on the eve of the clip season, should we push ahead with this proposal? The world market, as we know, means that, if we go straight into it, the price per kilo for the farmer will be reduced from 90p to 40p. Many hon. Members may be surprised to hear that, when added up, that is quite a large sum: £26 million will be taken out of the income of the agricultural community. According to the Minister's own figures, the very modest increases that have taken place among the hill livestock farms have not extended to all those in the sheep farming sector; in Scotland in particular, those incomes have fallen for the second year running.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

I spent some time with my sheep farmers in the Hallworthy market in Cornwall on Friday. Of course, it is true that the proportion of their farm income is less than it was five or 10 years ago, but that does not mean that it is totally worthless; I suspect that some hon. Members, if they suddenly found that 10 per cent. of their inoome were removed, would still feel that that was an appreciable sum. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may not realise that the average figure, which is about 5 per cent., is not the figure that I am quoting. For a hill farm, it is often a larger percentage of the total income. That is why last year—as we saw from the Minister's own figures—particularly in the less favoured areas, many sheep farmers' figures showed a larger percentage.

Mr. Curry: It must be a lesser proportion in the hills. In the hills, a farmer in a particularly disadvantaged area with a hardy breed receives £30·55; a farmer in another area, who does not receive the same benefit, receives £17·48. By definition, as the price of wool is constant, the amount must be less in the hills than in the lowlands.

Mr. Tyler: Using the Minister's own figures for last year, there was a reduction in Scotland for the second year running among hill livestock farmers, whereas in England and Waies there was only a modest increase. In those circumstances, it must surely be clear that removing part of the income will mean a substantial figure which will affect those concerned.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—who has now left the Chamber—made it clear in an intervention that it is the farmers who will lose out disproportionately. Some farmers, in some parts of the country, are clearly benefiting from the devaluation of the green currency. It may well be that in some areas—where Conservative Members represent comparatively large farms—this will not be a major problem; but for Liberal Democrat Members who represent a large number of smaller sheep farmers, it will represent a substantial cut in their incomes. Whether it is 5 or 10 per cent. is neither here nor there for those who are already making very small profits, or none at all. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says the average is 5 per cent., and I take his word for it. I am going by the average figure. I believe that many of those farming in marginal areas with marginal returns cannot yet take any more knocks than they have taken already.

Only a few months ago, many hon. Members who were present for the debate represented those affected by the cuts in the HLCAs. Surely the argument then was that, when a marginally profitable level already operates, every cut will be damaging. That surely is why this is the wrong time and the target is wrong.

I believe that the Minister should be listening to the views of the British Wool Federation and the National Farmers Union. Their view is clear: they believe that the order improperly anticipates Royal Assent of the Agriculture Bill. Indeed, it improperly anticipates our discussion of clause 50. The National Farmers Union said:

"In view of these extraordinary factors, the NFU, together with the British Wool Marketing Board, believe clause 50 of the Agriculture Bill should be amended to provide for the wool guarantee to be continued until 1995 (by which time the wool market is expected to be in better balance), or phased out over two years as was discussed with MAFF officials in early 1992."

The Minister said that there had been no such discussions or representations. The NFU also said:

"At minimum, the wool guarantee should continue for a further full clip year, that is until 30 April 1994, in order to avoid disruption to marketing and possible differential treatment between farmers."

The Minister has told us that all is sweetness and light, that everybody has agreed, that it is simple and that we can move quickly to the new circumstances. That is not the burden of the representations that have been made by all sectors of the industry. If the order is approved, the Minister owes it to the House and to the industry to guarantee that the shortfall in income, particularly for those at marginal levels of profitability——

Mr. Marlow *rose——*

Mr. Tyler: I am about to conclude. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech in a moment.

If the Minister wants to ensure that his assurances are not just paper assurances, he must guarantee that all the other forms of support to which he has referred, including HLCAs, are increased to compensate for the removal of this important element in the total income of hill and other sheep farmers.

11.31 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I want to say a word on behalf of the poor, benighted sheep farmers. My county of Gwynedd has more than 2 million sheep, and it has had a rough time in recent years. In addition to the other economic problems that hon. Members from sheep-raising areas will be aware of, we have had the acute experience of Chernobyl, which continues to affect 350 farms and 250,000 sheep in my part of Wales. Sheep farmers can well do without any further knock. This knock is unnecessary and could have been avoided, at least for this year. The Minister should take to heart the representations of the NFU, the Farmers Union of Wales and others for phasing. There is no need to move with such speed. I appeal to him, even at this late stage, to consider the matter again.

The most recent figures which I have for farm incomes for hill and upland livestock farms are for 1991. They show that in Wales no fewer than 65 per cent. of hill and upland livestock farms had a net income of less than £5,000. That compares with 30 per cent. in Scotland. Those people are working on the margins and they can ill afford any reduction. The reduction in the wool guarantee will make a difference. I do not pretend that it will make a massive difference, taking the industry as a whole, but for those on the margins it could make the difference between surviving and not doing so. I calculate that in my county we would lose about £1 million.

In 1991, the year which I quoted for net farm incomes, the guarantee was 130p per kg and the average price for wool at auction was 61p. Now it is well below that. A difference of 50p could have an enormous effect on the farmers. Therefore, in Wales, with 11 million sheep, compared to 20 million in England and about 10 million in Scotland, it will make a difference to those who are most vulnerable. Even at this late stage I appeal to the Minister to heed the voice of the industry and at the very least to give a 12-month period of grace.

11.34 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I venture with some unease into this debate amongst professionals who are well aware of what happens on upland sheep farms. First, I support my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) as a member of the all-party wool textile group. Indeed, I still have some textile interests in my constituency. I know some scourers as well, and I know a little about the importance of the English clip. I accept the main thrust of my hon. Friend's argument, which is that farmers rear sheep primarily for meat and that that is their main source of income. Not long ago the price of lamb in particular was at rock bottom. The industry—particularly the hill farmers—was in real difficulty. It is not a stable industry: there is much ebb and flow, due partly to consumer demand and partly to price.

Those of us who have the blessing of visiting uplands fairly often recognise the real need to maintain the upland farmer. The valleys and dales of Yorkshire must be properly farmed—worked in a way that is suitable only for the terrain over which the farmers have to earn their living. It is a pretty fragile industry. It is all very well to look at other sectors of agriculture that have a real prospect of generating income in most conditions. The upland sheep farmer operates between fragile margins of success and failure. I beg my hon. Friend to recognise that fact. If, in due course, there is to be a significant difference in the incomes of hill sheep farmers, the scheme might be reconstituted. For many years, it has been of extreme value to these people.

My second point relates to rare breeds. There has been a major effort to sustain the Herdwick, which at one point was in grave danger of running out. We have the Swaledale as well, but the Herdwick is a particular breed from the high Yorkshire dales and the lakeland fells, and it would be a real tragedy if it were lost as a result of this measure.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who has a robust interest in this matter, spoke with his usual tremendous grasp. I do not intend to enter into the debate about what happens if sheep are not clipped. I accept that there is many a tick between the fleece and the clip. I do not expect an answer from my hon. Friend at this stage, but I ask him to bear in mind the fact that, with regard to protection of the upland environment and of the upland breeds—quite apart from the importance of maintaining this fragile industry—what is being done is not necessarily very welcome or of huge significance in terms of agricultural support. However, it represents a very present help in trouble. And the troubles could well return.

11.38 pm

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I should like to say a few words before the Minister replies. Perhaps he would care to listen to the questions that I am about to put.

Is he prepared to monitor what happens over the next 12 months so that it may be established whether there has been a decline in the British clip? At this stage, Ministers are not prepared to accept that my proposition has any merit, and there is not much sympathy among Conservative Members for the case that I have made. However, there is a view—and it is held not just by my hon. Friends and myself—that there will be a decline in the British clip, and that this will have implications for the wool textile industry in the United Kingdom. Hon. Members may shake their heads, but I can assure them that this view is held. I ask merely that Ministers keep an eye on the situation to ensure that if there is a clip reduction consideration will be given to the introduction of some arrangement to prevent long-term consequences for British industry.

We shall divide the House on this matter. We shall wish to win, but if we are defeated Ministers should monitor the situation and consider what measures might be taken to deal with any damage.

11.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): I am pleased to respond to some of the points raised tonight. We heard an astonishing speech from the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). The one good point that he made was so obvious that it hardly needed to be made—that the situation should be monitored. Agriculture Ministers monitor all the time everything that is happening. Effective organisations participated in the hill farming review, and our close relationship with the farmers' unions of all countries enables us to know what is happening.

We are not in any way winding up the British wool marketing board—certainly not. We are dealing only with the scheme. I give warm thanks to the board's chairman and members, who have done exceptionally well. I particularly want to mention Joe Raine, who will be well known to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), and who has done so much in the north of England over such a long time.

The board has done outstandingly good work in its 40 year's existence. I declare an interest: I have been a customer of the board for all those 40 years. There have been five years to plan for the Government's decision, and in that time the board had an opportunity to prepare its financial situation, build up its reserves, which now stand at some £10 million, and cushion the effect of the price drop that will occur this year, being the difference between last year's guaranteed price and this year's market price.

The price schedule issued last week shows that the difference between the market and guaranteed price will be in the region of 50 per cent. This year, farmers will receive the 50 per cent. that was held back last year, so there will not be the dramatic price drop that the hon. Member for Workington and others suggested.

Over the past five years, the board has worked on minimising the effect of the change on farmers and on customers. It has certainly taken its duties very seriously.

The hon. Member for Workington devoted most of his speech to animal welfare. Any right hon. or hon. Member who has, like myself, been involved in sheep farming for many years will know that the hon. Gentleman's fears and criticisms are wholly unfounded. If he really believes that the average farmer will allow his flock to go unclippped in the year, he is miles from reality.

The hon. Gentleman might equally have said last year, when we stopped compulsory dipping, that farmers would not dip to save money—but they all dipped. Dipping is important in respect of not only scab but fly, and clipping and dipping—as hill and lowland farmers well know—are an essential part of sheep husbandry.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Is the Minister aware that, sadly, prosecutions for cruelty to

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

farm animals increased last year? Although we would not claim that such farmers are in the majority, unfortunately a minority mistreat farm animals. Given marginal incomes, the pressure on that minority will increase. Does not the Minister accept that that real risk ought to be taken seriously?

Sir Hector Monro: Everything is taken seriously, but one must look at risks at face value. The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Workington totally exaggerate the order's likely repercussions. It is part of normal sheep husbandry to clip and to dip. Those operations will continue as before.

Having been a member of the all-party wool textile group, I appreciate how much my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and her colleagues have done to promote the textile industry. I live in a textile area, so I appreciate the importance of the wool clip to the textile industry. Mills or brokers in my part of the world have not complained that our proposals will have a detrimental effect on the wool and textile industry.

Nor, indeed, have I received complaints from fellmongers, who are an important part of the industry. I believe, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State said in opening, that there will be ample wool supplies—and possibly at a lower cost than in the past—and that the industry will not be harmed by the order.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister said that he has received no complaints from people in the wool processing industry. That is my understanding of what he said. Did he consult them? Were the Government's proposals circularised? Have not they protested to the Ministry? Have not they written letters and sought meetings with Ministers to object? Is he saying that this is a figment of our imagination? Is he saying that people in the industry have misled Labour Members by suggesting that they have been making representations on these issues? Is it all a figment of our imagination?

Sir Hector Monro: Yes, it must be. I check my daily correspondence very carefully. I have had no letters from the textile or fellmongering industries.

Mrs. Peacock: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. All I can say is that everybody in the industry wrote to the chairman of the all-party wool textile group instead. I assure my hon. Friend that I have received plenty of letters and I took deputations to see my hon. Friend the Minister of State. They obviously sent their letters to me rather than to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary.

Sir Hector Monro: If my hon. Friend has had voluminous correspondence, it would be nice if she were to pass it on to me so that I can deal with it. We are most concerned for the wool and textile industry, especially the hosiery industry, which has had such a struggle in recent years. I am not criticising. I am saying that the order will not make the situation any worse. Indeed, it may help because prices may be lower.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) was concerned about timing. His forecast of farm incomes is, frankly, not true. For the past two years, hill farm incomes in Scotland have increased by 40 per cent. That is agreed by the hill farming review and there is no doubt about it. We have been over the figures umpteen times. The figures have been produced by academics throughout the United Kingdom, and the statement of fact is reflected in the sheep annual premium, the hill livestock commensatory allowance, the suckler cow subsidy and all the other assets that have been devoted to helping hill farming.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) saw the position sensibly and he wished it to be kept in proportion. We shall monitor the situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) said that it is important to maintain upland farms, and I could not agree more. That is exactly why we have increased subsidies for hill farmers in recent years. Under the sheep annual premium, the HLCAs, the suckler cow subsidy and environmentally sensitive areas assistance will be given to environmentally friendly ways of farming.

We are certainly looking after the hill farming sector, especially where wool is involved. There is no reason to feel that the change under the order will have a serious impact on farming incomes. We are convinced that it will be as low as 5 per cent. or less. We can get it right in conjunction with the British wool marketing board. I know that there are difficulties because of world wool prices, but it is possible that they will improve. It is the board's leadership on quality and its determination constantly to raise standards which will provide the likely route to success. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 189, Noes 150.

Division No. 284] **[11.49 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset North)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M. *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles

Hicks, Robert
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B. *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(Hants NW)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman, and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N. *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hinchliffe, David
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil *(Islwyn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, William
Patchett, Terry
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L.
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Jack Thompson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (S.I., 1993, No. 1184), dated 29th April 1993, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th April, be approved.

PETITIONS

Section 11 Funding

12 midnight

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): It gives me considerable pleasure to present this petition to the House on behalf of my constituents in Stretford, especially those associated with primary and secondary schools who face the withdrawal of section 11 funding and who are concerned about the impact of that withdrawal on the quality and quantity of education in those hard-pressed parts of the borough of Trafford.

The petition says:

the withdrawal of section 11 funding will have a serious impact on the quality of education and opportunities for young people. Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable house reconsider this decision.

I make it clear that I fully support the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Sub-Post Offices

12.1 am

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I present a petition on behalf of the people of Glanford and Scunthorpe in relation to the threat to sub-post offices and to the right of people to choose how they receive their benefits, whether through a bank account, a building society account or, as many of my constituents want, across the counter of their local post offices.

The petition has been raised in sub-post offices all over my constituency: in villages such as Broughton and Bottesford and in urban areas such as Lincoln gardens, Henderson avenue and Ashby. A whole range of sub-post offices shares this concern.

The petition says:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland assembled. The Humble Petition of the people of Glanford and Scunthorpe sheweth that the government is proposing to change the method of paying pensions and other benefits to Automated Credit Transfer without adequate choice, and we the undersigned vigorously protest against this proposal.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for Social Security to ensure that people will retain the clear right to cash their benefits at Post Offices.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Assurances have been given, but assurances were given in the election and were broken. I hope that the Government take note of the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Wakefield (Assisted Area Status)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

12.3 am

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I have lost count of the number of occasions on which my three hon. Friends and I who represent the four Wakefield district constituencies have secured Adjournment debates to express our concern about the impact of Government economic and industrial policy on employment in our area. Our constituents in the Wakefield, Dewsbury, Castleford and Pontefract travel-to-work areas have seen during the 1980s and the early 1990s the systematic destruction of what has for generations been the economic base of the area—the coal industry. In our localities, we have experienced the wiping out of traditional male employment on an unprecedented scale. One needs to live in the area, as I and my three hon. Friends do, fully to understand the human implications of the changes.

My purpose in securing tonight's debate is further to press the Government to face their responsibilities in ensuring that our constituents in Wakefield can look forward to much better employment prospects than is, frankly, the case at present. It is to argue that the same Government who led the way in destroying the prospects of so many in our area have a duty to recognise the difficulties that the Wakefield district faces and ensure that the two travel-to-work areas involved are accorded assisted area status as a matter of urgency.

The Minister will say that our area, like many others, has been a victim of a wide recession, whether it be the last recession or the previous one over which the Government presided. I have spent considerable time in my constituency speaking to businesses involved in a wide range of activities. I am consistently told that the lack of any sort of economic or industrial strategy causes them the most difficulty. I have lost track of the number of times that managers in what is left of the mining engineering sector—people who are often politically sympathetic to the Government—have decried the complete absence of any form of energy policy.

Less than a fortnight ago, I was told by one local company with an interest in rail freight that it knew that the Government intended to privatise the railways. But what was their wider strategy for transport? People who are intimately involved in the industry simply could not detect one. The lack of any overall industrial strategy has meant that local companies producing for the export market have felt undermined by the Government. I have pressed this point on several occasions at Trade and Industry questions.

Producers of leading edge mining engineering technology with huge export potential find that the process of marketing their products is hampered by a British Government destroying the main marketing point—British pits—while the wider economic consequences are obvious from the balance of trade. In Wakefield, we pick up the pieces at the local level in terms of the impact on jobs and family prosperity.

The Minister is fully aware of the job losses that have occurred in the Wakefield district recently because of the coal closure programme. My constituency has no pits left and the decline of coal has had a huge impact on related industries such as engineering. We have seen major

closures such as British Ropes, Wooltex and Gullick Pitcraft, and companies such as British Jeffery Diamond have dramatically reduced their work forces. Numerous smaller producers for the coal industry have also shed jobs.

There must be serious doubts about the prospects of the remaining companies in the light of the implications of the DTI White Paper on the coal industry. The proposed closure shortly of Sharlston colliery, with a direct loss of nearly 700 more mining jobs, will add further to this spiral of decline. Undoubtedly, my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) will refer to that closure if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) will probably detail the impact of the closure of Grimethorpe colliery on the Wakefield area if he gets an opportunity to speak in this debate.

Their comments will reinforce representations made by Wakefield metropolitan district council to the Department of Trade and Industry about the changes that have occurred in Wakefield since the local authority made its original submissions for consideration during the review of assisted area status. In a letter dated 7 April 1992 to the Department, the leader of the local authority estimated that, with the closure of Sharlston and Grimethorpe, together with job losses at Kellingley, Prince of Wales and Frickley collieries, no fewer than 1,250 miners resident in Wakefield have subsequently lost their jobs.

It will be fairly obvious to the Minister that the marked decline in traditionally male employment, such as mining and engineering, has meant that women have increasingly become the breadwinners in many local families. But particularly alarming in recent weeks has been the announcement of proposals to close two major companies in Wakefield which employ many women in their work forces.

The announcement of the closure of Lofthouse Foods in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton was made on 23 April with a loss of about 1,300 jobs. A fortnight later, on 7 May, it was announced that the Lyons Bakeries plant in my constituency was to close, with the loss of about 500 jobs. Such closures would have a devastating effect on any area, but against a background of thousands of recent job losses in the coal and engineering industries, there is now extreme concern in Wakefield about the economic and social implications of the employment situation.

The local authority is to be commended on its efforts to attract industry to the district. It has had some notable successes with Coca-Cola, Schweppes, Pioneer and others, but it recognises that, despite the arrival in Wakefield of several new companies, we are continuing to experience an alarming decline in employment opportunities.

The Wakefield Europort project has been seen by the Wakefield metropolitan district council as a basis for the generation of about 6,500 new jobs in the district. As the Minister will be aware, public funding is being sought from both EC and United Kingdom sources as a catalyst for the development of the project. The project site is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), who has worked long and hard to secure its completion.

The proposed Europort consists of a terminal, one of nine Euroterminals in the United Kingdom, and a one-stop European freight centre for businesses in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. The promoters of the scheme believe that better transport links to the continent will help to encourage foreign investment. The proximity of the site to the motorway network will ensure minimal transhipment problems and easy access by road to other parts of the region. The Europort will enhance export opportunities for regional firms by providing greater speed and efficiency of distribution. It will encourage locally based firms to reinvest in the region in the knowledge that European markets are easily accessible.

Port Wakefield is a public-private sector development which would clearly bring significant benefit to the whole region, as well as to the immediate Wakefield district. However, in view of the current economic climate, there is serious anxiety that this vital project may not proceed. Several grant sources—European regional development fund and derelict land grant—have been explored jointly with the Department of the Environment to assist in the implementation of the project. It is hoped that the grants will be forthcoming.

However, the factor that would be of most benefit would be the awarding of assisted areas status to the Castleford and Pontefract travel-to-work area. As well as offering incentives to inward investors, designation as an intermediate development area would assist with infrastructure elements of the scheme.

My hon. Friends and I who represent the Wakefield constituencies have felt aggrieved for several years that the district's problems have not received proper Government recognition. The unemployment statistics have consistently shown Wakefield to have levels of unemployment well above that in areas which receive assistance.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech the human implications of Wakefield's employment problems. As my hon. Friends and I come from and live in the Wakefield district, many of the statistics relate to people known to us personally—neighbours, friends and sometimes relatives. I cannot emphasise too strongly the profound anger that I feel meeting every day when I am at home men of my age and younger whose jobs have disappeared and who believe, perhaps rightly, that they have little prospect of getting back into regular employment. The Government have a duty to assist such men to regain their self-respect and return to regular work.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise these points tonight. I hope that the Minister will recognise the strength of Wakefield's case.

12.15 am

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in emphasising the need for assistance to be given to the Wakefield area in total. That assistance is made more necessary because in the past four weeks it has become clear that 2,000 jobs will be lost in my constituency. The Sharlston colliery will close with the loss of 700 jobs, and Lofthouse Foods will close shortly, with the loss of 1,300 jobs. These are just two examples of the devastation that my constituency is suffering. In addition to those 2,000 jobs, there are a further 2,000 jobs in the location of the two major factories I have mentioned that will be lost.

That is the significance of this appeal tonight for some assistance to be given to the Wakefield area.

I am disappointed that the Minister for Industry is not present. It was important that he be here, because it was he who, on 30 October last year, sent a letter to the

[Mr. William O'Brien]

Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on industry saying that RECHAR money would not be available to mining areas. RECHAR money would have meant that £140 million could have been available for the development of mining areas. It is therefore disappointing that the Minister is not here to say why we have not had that money over the past three years.

The allocation was for the three years up to 1993. We feel that we have been betrayed, because money that should have been available to help the development of the mining areas, in particular the Wakefield and district area, has been denied to us. If the Minister were here, he would have to explain why we were not allowed to have our money.

I want to re-emphasise the need for some assistance to the area. We have been pleading for assisted area status. A deputation to meet the Minister, including members of the local authority and the four Members for the Wakefield area, made clear in November last year the need for assisted area status to help us over the unemployment problem that was looming then and has since become worse because of the closure of Lofthouse Foods, which was unannounced and a surprise to everyone in the area.

I put it to the Minister that it is important that some assistance be given by way of assisted area status to the Wakefield area. I join my colleagues in asking that there be no further delay. The information is now available; the 1991 census figures are there. The question of assisted area status was first brought forward in June 1990, and the time has come for decisions to be made. I hope that Wakefield will be included in those decisions and will rejoin the map of areas enjoying assisted area status.

12.18 am

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): My hon. Friends have put the case admirably for assisted area status, and I will point out briefly some of the reasons why, in Hemsworth constituency particularly, we need that.

I will start by detailing the unemployment levels in the various wards: ward 11, 14 per cent.; ward 12, 15·1 per cent.; ward 18, 11·5 per cent.—that is in Ackworth, where it is principally professional people now going out of employment; ward 19, 17 per cent.; and ward 20, 20·3 per cent.

Those are appalling figures, but they existed before the closure of Sharlston and Grimethorpe. In the villages of Havercroft, South Heindley and Ryhill now, male unemployment is above 40 per cent. There are no official statistics, but unofficially, that is the best practical estimate we can make. Hemsworth is a microcosm of what has happened in the Wakefield area.

A mere 10 years ago, Hemsworth had more pits than any other constituency in the entire United Kingdom, including Scotland and Wales. Today it has one, Frickley, which is being rapidly run down and currently under threat in spite of the promises of the President of the Board of Trade.

As the Minister knows, these figures underestimate the real unemployment figure. I am not trying to make a political point; the Minister knows that some of the miners who are out of work, although they want to work, are not included in the statistics. That creates a serious social situation, particularly since the few jobs that exist in my constituency are extremely poorly paid. More than 50 per cent. of the jobs that were available were paying under £3 per hour.

No one can envisage living on £120 a week. It is appalling. We are being left with more cheap jobs because firms such as Thyssen and Felkirk Engineers, which are dependent on supplying the mining industry, are having to run down.

British Coal Enterprise Ltd. is our great hope, but, in our experience, it comes in, stays for six weeks and quietly folds up its tent and goes out into the night. It has remarkably little impact upon employment.

The number of free school meals in the primary schools in my constituency is going up rapidly, and in more than five of them the figure is over 50 per cent. That is an alarming statistic.

The derelict land is totally unsuitable for new industry. We are left with dereliction and the threat of opencast mining in our only piece of open countryside, Wintersett. As the local authority, quite understandably, has not been able to keep up with repairs, the housing conditions are appalling.

I invite the Minister to come to the Scotch estate, which is an example of a dilapidated estate which has basically good housing but which would be improved enormously by assisted area status. It would give us the opportunity to uplift socially and allow people to live in good conditions.

In conclusion, assisted area status would stop the downward spiral, and I beseech the Minister to see to it that we get it.

12.23 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Neil Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on initiating the debate, and the hon. Members for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on their contributions. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Normanton feels that I am an inadequate substitute for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Industry, but I am a northern Member of Parliament, and as a Minister in the Department I am collectively responsible for the decisions we take, so I hope that my answers to the points that have been made in the debate will have equal authority.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) for being here this evening to give me moral support as a Member for the other side of the Pennines where my constituency is situated. He came to see me before Christmas with a delegation from his own local authority to plead the case for assisted area status, and he did it extremely eloquently.

I am fully aware of the strength of feeling that exists in Wakefield and the importance that is attached to the application for assisted area status. The case has been made forcibly tonight and in written submissions, and at a meeting with my noble Friend Baroness Denton of Wakefield on 4 November last, when a delegation from Wakefield, including the local Members, made a clear presentation of all the key issues.

As hon. Members know, the current review of the assisted areas map was announced last June, and the criteria on which the review is based were set out in a consultation document. We invited interested parties to submit their views. During the consultation period, over 1,500 written representations have been received. My

ministerial colleagues and I at the Department of Trade and Industry have met more than 50 delegations, in addition to delegations that have been seen by Ministers at the Scottish Office and Welsh Office. So the needs and circumstances of all areas have been carefully considered in the review.

As part of that process, we have continued to monitor the economic situation in Wakefield, and the results of the review will be announced as soon as possible, following the necessary clearance by the European Commission. As the House will understand, I cannot anticipate those decisions tonight, so I am afraid that I am not in a position to give any advance indication about whether Wakefield will succeed in obtaining assisted area status.

I fully appreciate the difficulties encountered by businesses in Wakefield, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out, in the last two to three years. No region or sub-region —indeed, no industrialised nation—has been insulated from recessionary pressures, regardless of the political complexion of the Governments concerned. These have led to some painful rationalisations and restructuring across all business sectors.

The recession has lasted longer than expected, but I believe that all the ingredients for recovery are now in place—low inflation, lower interest rates, a competitive exchange rate, rising productivity and slower wage growth. So although we have undoubtedly been through a bruising period, I believe that the economic prospects, for Wakefield in particular, are better. They cannot be viewed in isolation from the prospects of the United Kingdom economy as a whole, and there are clear signs of a resumption in economic growth suggesting a sustainable recovery this year.

For example, total output has been rising for nearly a year and non-oil output rose by 0·5 per cent. in the first quarter of 1993; manufacturing output is 2 per cent. higher in the first quarter than in 1992; retail sales are at a record level in the three months to April, up 3·25 per cent. on a year earlier; productivity and exports are at record levels and are growing strongly; seasonally adjusted unemployment is down for the third consecutive month in April; and consumers and business men are now much more optimistic about the prospects for the economy. So, although I would not seek to disguise the scale of the problem, there are causes for optimism.

The final point I cited—about the growth in economic optimism—is very much supported by the latest business surveys conducted in West Yorkshire. The regional CBI, the Leeds chamber and the mid-Yorkshire chamber all report strengthening business confidence and increased expectations of gradual and sustainable growth.

The speed and impact will inevitably vary across sectors and between areas, but it is encouraging that there are definite signs of increasing investment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Investment intentions among Yorkshire and Humberside companies are among the strongest in the United Kingdom, according to the most recent CBI survey.

The recent decrease in regional unemployment is particularly welcome, but it is probably too soon to be absolutely sure of a clear downward trend, and there are distressing cases such as those raised by, in particular, the hon. Member for Normanton, of closures that have been announced recently.

But the Yorkshire and Humberside seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment of 10·5 per cent. in April is down 0·2 per cent. on January 1993 and is now only 0·1 per cent. above the national average compared with 0·3 per cent. a year ago. I agree that unemployment is still too high, and we look forward to a sustained fall. In Wakefield, the unemployment rate in April fell for the third consecutive month, and that is a welcome sign.

Mr. William O'Brien *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I will not give way. I have only a few minutes in which to reply——

Mr. O'Brien *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: No, I will not give way. There were three speeches in the debate and only a few minutes remain, and I am anxious to give as full a response as I can.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to recent job losses in Wakefield, including the British Coal redundancies at Kellingley and Sharlston and the closures at Northern Foods and Lyons Bakeries. I can assure him that these have been taken into consideration as part of the assisted area map review process.

I recognise that AA status is important to Wakefield, but it would be misleading to suggest that its benefits would be the only source of Government assistance. That is plainly not the case. In response to British Coal redundancies at Sharlston and Kellingley we have already introduced the following local package of measures as part of an overall national regeneration programme totalling £200 million. First, the DTI will extend the regional investment grants to 12 wards in Wakefield and Castleford. This was announced on 13 May and will encourage small firms employing fewer than 25 people to invest in new plant and equipment.

This represents an important boost to the small business sector in Wakefield and complements support for new product development under the related regional innovation grant scheme which was extended to Wakefield in May 1992.

English Estates has prepared a £4 million programme of industrial and commercial development for Wakefield. The Wakefield TEC and the Employment Service will receive an additional £1·87 million in respect of Sharlston and £1·3 million for Kellingley, shared with the North Yorkshire TEC, for a combination of training and business support. In addition, Wakefield council has been invited to bid to the Department of the Environment-administered coalfield areas fund for projects designed to alleviate problems caused by the Sharlston closure.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to the Port Wakefield project, involving AMEC and a potential 7,000 new jobs as part of a rail freight terminal development. Government Departments are currently in discussion with AMEC over the details of the scheme and the possibilities for public financial sector support.

These measures are additional to the significant amount of public investment being made in Wakefield through both United Kingdom Government and European mechanisms. For example, since 1990-91 Wakefield council has reclaimed almost 200 acres of derelict land, largely former colliery sites, as part of a 1,500 acre programme, and has received £3·5 million in grant from the Department of the Environment. Over £6 million business support funding under existing European programmes, including RECHAR, has been offered, largely utilising effective local partnerships of regeneration

[Mr. Hamilton]

agencies. Examples include a small business equity fund through British Coal Enterprise, the Ferrybridge resource centre and the Wakefield business and technical information centre. There has also been over £10 million infrastructure support under the mid-Yorkshire operational programme in the last two financial years. Wakefield TEC annual training and enterprise budgets are in excess of £12 million a year.

I believe that these measures will provide a significant contribution to the future prosperity of Wakefield, whether or not the district is successful in obtaining assisted area status. That alone cannot be a panacea for all the district's problems, which will need to be tackled on a wider front through a continuing and extended partnership of all the relevant regeneration agencies, including the DTI, other Government Departments, the local authority, the TEC, and the private sector.

We do not underestimate the current difficulties facing coalfield areas like Wakefield. That is why the £200 million regeneration package was devised and the assisted area map review has been delayed to take account of the coal review. I know that hon. Members would like a decision as soon as possible, and as soon as the EC aspects of the decision have been cleared, we will announce it at the earliest possible opportunity.

We must be careful not to over-emphasise these current economic problems, to the detriment of the area. Wakefield has a number of significant strengths which will be crucial to its continuing diversification and regeneration and, in particular, it enjoys an excellent location alongside the M62/M1 motorway network, first class communications and a loyal and industrious work force. That is why it has already been successful in attracting several significant inward investment projects, including Pioneer and Coca-Cola, and a host of other smaller projects.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 26 May 1993

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Tuesday 8 June at Seven o'clock.

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL *(By Order)*

WOODGRANGE PARK CEMETERY BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 10 June.

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [8 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate to be resumed on Thursday 10 June.

CROYDON TRAMLINK BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 10 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Repository (Sellafield)

1. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further consideration he has given to UK Nirex Ltd.'s work programme to establish a deep repository at Sellafield for the disposal of radioactive waste, following the publication of the annual report of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Maclean): It is for Nirex to bring forward its proposals in accordance with its timetable.

Mr. Salmond: Is it not the case that the publication of the Government's own advisory committee's report has left their and Nirex's policy in disarray, and that the likelihood is that Sellafield will prove geologically unsuitable as a nuclear dump? Will the Minister advise Nirex not to look north again to Dounreay as an alternative site? Will he accept that there is no case, no support and ultimately no chance of the north of Scotland accepting a position as Europe's nuclear midden?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is jumping to far too many conclusions very far down a hypothetical route. It is entirely up to Nirex to decide to take into account the recommendations of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. It is for Nirex to decide where it wants the deep disposal laboratory and to ask the regulatory authorities to ensure that it has taken into account all the appropriate safety considerations.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that many workers in Scotland regularly lobby his Department and the Department of Trade and Industry to ensure that we have plenty of jobs in the nuclear industry and that it is very divisive for hon. Members to suggest that nuclear waste should not be stored in one part of the United Kingdom as opposed to another?

Mr. Maclean: Yes, it is a pity if the issue becomes a political football that the nationalists wish to kick around the court. It is entirely a matter for Nirex to advance its plans for a deep disposal repository, and it is entirely appropriate for an independent advisory body such as RoWMAC to comment on those proposals. They will all be taken into account by the appropriate regulatory authorities.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: But the Minister cannot abdicate his responsibility for these matters. Does he not realise that the great majority of people in Cumbria and, indeed, in his constituency, are wholly opposed to the nonsensical proposition?

Mr. Maclean: First, I should prefer to speak for my own constituents, rather than have the hon. Gentleman pretend to do so.

There is no question of the Government's abdicating their responsibilities. Our responsibilities are very clearly laid down in statute, and there is no question of Nirex or RoWMAC abdicating their responsibilities either. It is up to Nirex to make its proposals for a deep repository and

up to RoWMAC to comment on them. Of course, should there be an inquiry into the rock characterisation facility, those points could be made. The Government have promised a full public inquiry should the main disposal facility be advanced.

Local Services (Leicestershire)

2. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to visit Leicestershire to meet representatives of the county council to discuss the provision of local services.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. John Redwood): I have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Marshall: I am disappointed by the Minister's response. Is he aware that at the recent local elections, Tory candidates did badly in Leicestershire, as in all the shire counties, but especially in my constituency where they received only 17 per cent. of the vote? Is he further aware that that derisory vote is a condemnation not only of national Government policy but of local Tory policies, especially the setting of a recent county council budget which condemned to closure the Beale Street nursery, the Goldhill adventure playground and the Highfield adventure playground, all in my constituency? If the new county council takes steps to reverse that decision, will the Minister guarantee that neither he nor his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will intervene?

Mr. Redwood: It is, of course, up to each county council to make its own decisions on budgets and taxation, within the normal annual cycle and within the law. I hope that the county councillors in Leicestershire, and elsewhere, decide to get good value for money and to pursue the right policies, with common sense. That would be easier if there were more Conservatives on the authority, but I hope that the Labour councillors will take on board some of the messages from my hon. Friends and from Conservative county councillors around the country about how to get proper value for money and how to live easily within the budget limits set.

Housing Associations

3. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses are forecast to be provided by housing associations over the next three years.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Howard): The Housing Corporation currently expects to provide grant towards about 170,000 homes over the next three years. In addition, local authorities will fund schemes, using local authority housing association grant.

Mr. Moss: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on announcing a significant 11 per cent. increase in the number of new homes to be built, over and above our manifesto pledge of last year. Over the past year, local authorities in my constituency of Cambridgeshire, North-East have benefited substantially from housing association money. Will my right hon. and learned Friend also confirm that the announcement in the autumn statement that the rules on capital receipts were to be relaxed provided yet more opportunity for investment in new homes built for rent?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I can certainly give him the confirmation that he seeks. We estimate that about £1 billion worth of capital receipts may be available for investment in housing, and local authorities can use them to support housing associations' new build. In 1992-93, about 6,000 new houses were built using local authority housing association grant, and the Housing Corporation's own programme for 1993-94 has been expanded by about £117 million in contributions from local authorities.

Mrs. Dunwoody: When will the Secretary of State be able to tackle the problem that more housing associations face every day, whereby their need to balance the books means that they will soon be charging rents that will be extremely difficult for people who need low-cost housing to pay? Is not he aware that many councils gave assistance to housing associations, providing suitable sites at peppercorn rents, or selling them cheaply, on the assumption that low-cost housing would be provided, yet now they find that their own people are being priced out of the new housing associations?

Mr. Howard: People who need low-cost housing get the help provided through housing benefit, which is an excellent example of a targeted benefit directed to people who need help.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my right hon. and learned Friend examine housing associations' practice of demanding land from local authorities for nothing, which is causing great resentment among local authorities that are obliged to give up land for housing to housing associations? Will he also re-examine the right to buy housing association properties?

Mr. Howard: Housing associations are not in a position to demand what my hon. Friend says that they demand. We are encouraging them to work with local authorities and they are increasingly doing so. I will give careful consideration to my hon. Friend's suggestion concerning the right to buy.

Mr. Battle: Is not it a fact that housing associations will still provide a mere 3 per cent. of the total housing stock, and that all the Government's piecemeal housing initiatives together will go nowhere near providing the 100,000 new homes for rent every year that the Institute of Housing and other bodies say are desperately needed by thousands of homeless people still sleeping out, and by the 147,000 people registered with local authorities as statutorily homeless? Will not the intention of the Secretary of State's right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to cut housing benefit later this year force even more people to lose their homes in the face of high and rising rents?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense, as he usually does. We are making substantial progress in addressing the housing problems which we face. It will not do at all for Labour party spokesmen to come to the Dispatch Box and reel off meaningless statistics, while claiming to be a party of financial probity, for one claim is totally inconsistent with the other.

Social Housing (Rural Areas)

4. **Mr. Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide additional financial resources for the provision of low-cost social housing in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The Government provide support for low-cost rural housing through the Housing Corporation and local authority housing investment programme allocations. The Housing Corporation plans to approve 1,850 new housing association homes this year under its rural housing programme. That is in addition to the 5,500 homes for which the programme has provided funding since it began in 1989-90. Last year, the housing market package enabled housing associations to buy some 730 homes in villages with a population of 3,000 or fewer. Support for rural housing has also been provided through allocations for local authorities under the housing partnership fund.

Mr. Hicks: The existing situation may appear to be encouraging, but is the Minister aware of the increasing anxiety about the future provision of adequate affordable social housing in rural areas, given the proposed changes in the level of grant support for housing associations? Does he recognise the implications that that will have for rents, particularly in low-income areas such as mine, and the implications of the poverty trap for the families involved?

Mr. Baldry: This year, we were able to bring the grant rate down from 72 to 69 per cent. without any significant impact on rents whatever. However, we were able to ensure that we could build 3,300 more homes. I thought that my hon. Friend would have welcomed that, because many of the homes were able to go into rural areas.

Mr. Winnick: Why does not the Minister admit that the supply of new housing association dwellings has not in any way been able to make up for the fact that, for 14 years, local authorities in rural areas, as well as elsewhere, have simply not been able to build? Although I am not a vindictive person, is the Minister aware that sometimes I wish that Ministers were in the position of constituents of mine and so many other hon. Members—suffering great housing hardship and misery because they cannot afford to buy and having no way of being rehoused either by a local authority or housing association? Why must such people suffer simply because of Tory dogma?

Mr. Baldry: This year, we are investing through the Housing Corporation £2·3 billion in housing associations building a large number of new homes. Moreover, we are making significant sums available to local authorities such as Walsall to invest in improving their own housing stocks to ensure that every family in the country has a decent home in which to live.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend bear in mind what my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, South-East (Mr. Hicks) said about the rents charged by some housing associations, especially when land has been given to them and the rent is nearly the market rent, which does little to help those in the west country who cannot afford that sort of rent when they are trying to find accommodation?

Mr. Baldry: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, we are seeking to ensure that the housing benefit is targeted at those who need help with their housing costs. Of course, we want to ensure that there is affordable housing in rural areas, as elsewhere, and we are investing substantial sums. In addition to the money that is being made available to local authorities in Devon and elsewhere through the housing investment programme, local authorities will be able to spend their capital receipts this year. Money is also available through the housing partnership fund. Some £30 million is available nationwide and £5 million is being allocated to the south-west. Under the Housing Corporation's rural programme, 2,500 new homes have been allocated to rural areas. All that demonstrates a substantial investment in rural housing in my right hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere.

Eco-labels

5. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on what further progress has been made on eco-labels.

Mr. Maclean: The criteria for washing machines and dish washers, prepared by the United Kingdom, have been agreed by the EC regulatory committee and will be published shortly. Proposed criteria for light bulbs, toilet paper and kitchen paper will be considered by the regulatory committee in June. The launch of the scheme is planned for late June.

Mr. Bennett: Can the Minister tell us how soon we will get some products with the labels on in shops? Can he confirm that for three years the Government have been stalling the idea of a United Kingdom scheme on the basis that we would get an EC-wide system and that, even with the products to which he referred, such a system will apply only in a third of the countries in the EC and some of our partners have done nothing at all to introduce eco-labels?

Mr. Maclean: I can confirm the last part of the hon. Gentleman's statement. However, I got the impression from the first part that he was taking his ire out on the United Kingdom by accusing us of stalling. We have pressed the Commission time and again. Indeed, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was President of the European Community he pressed the Commission to make urgent proposals to get the eco-labelling scheme up and running. I even threatened at the Dispatch Box to run our own scheme unless progress was made. Due to our pressure, the Commission has listened and the products to which I referred are coming to the launch pad. I hope to see some of the first products in the shops by September. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we will keep up the pressure for other countries to do their share of eco-labelling, because we think that it is a rather good scheme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I welcome the good technical work that is being done on product groups and the robust view that the United Kingdom Government are taking at European level. However, as the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, other countries are not playing their part. They are backsliding. Is it not time that we applied pressure to the European Commission to take

those countries to the European Court for failing in their undertakings and specifically for failing to designate national competent bodies?

Mr. Maclean: It is true that about half a dozen other countries in the EC have not yet designated competent bodies. The Commission has written to those countries urging them to do so. I hope that they will comply with the Commission's request as soon as possible, because it is in the interests of all our consumers in the EC who wish to do their bit to help the environment and to have the choice of selecting the most environmentally sound products. I assure my hon. Friend that we will keep up our constant pressure on the Commission for others to pull their full weight, just as we are doing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister agree that it would be better not to have double standards and that if we are to have eco-labelling, it is not much good if the customer does not pay any attention to what is written on the label? In that context, as the Government have labelled Twyford down and Oxleas wood as environmentally important, will he have urgent discussions with his colleagues in the Department of Transport——

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to put one over. We are dealing with eco-labelling. If the hon. Gentleman remains with eco-labelling, he may finish his question.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Minister make sure that once we label things as important, we follow what we say that we should do with them?

Mr. Maclean: It would be fascinating to take a lecture on double standards from a representative of the party that has 651 standards—one for every constituency in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Oppenheim: Should not that great success be followed by pushing eco-labelling in to other areas? The Labour party supported allowing water boards to maintain their policing role, which resulted in some of the most polluted beaches in Europe. It also supported the burning of dirty high-sulphur coal over clean gas. In short, as it is the party which puts vested interests before the environment, should not there be a special grubby eco-label for the Labour party?

Mr. Maclean: I think that the Labour party and its characteristics are well known to the electorate. They do not need to be specifically labelled.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Minister will agree that a eco-labelling scheme will be fully effective only if it goes hand in hand with a strengthening of the Trades Description Act to ensure that companies cannot make bogus environmental claims for the products that they sell. The Government said in 1990 that they would introduce legislation to strengthen the Act. They repeated that pledge to the Select Committee in 1991. That legislation would have the full support of the Opposition. Why do not the Government do it now?

Mr. Maclean: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, because this is the first time, when I have been opposite him, that he has come to the Dispatch Box with a point that is correct. We wish to amend the Trades Description Act. It is important that we do so in order that there can be no bogus claims on eco-labelling, as there are in other areas. We are giving urgent consideration to the matter and we will introduce suitable proposals as soon as parliamentary time permits us to do so.

Council Tax

6. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average council tax for a band C house in Wandsworth and for a band C house in Lambeth.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robin Squire): The average headline band C council tax for two adults in Wandsworth is £399, whereas in Lambeth it is £560.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. I wonder whether he could take matters one stage further by discerning any particular pattern between high-spending councils that make iniquitous demands and any particular political party in control of them.

Mr. Squire: It is a fact that the 10 highest council taxes have been set by Labour councils. My hon. Friend will also be aware that, across the country, the average band C tax payer pays less under Conservative-controlled councils than he or she does under Labour ones.

Mr. Fraser: Will the Minister confirm that the transitional relief for band C occupiers in Wandsworth is substantially higher than that for band C occupiers in Lambeth? Will he give a typical comparison between the two boroughs?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Member must surely be aware that transitional relief is a national scheme designed to go to those households that face the largest increase in bills with the change of system. It is, of course, the case that it will go rather more to those high-value property areas that had lower community charge bills. Lambeth is a relatively high-value property area, but, by golly, it is a very high community charge and council tax area.

Mr. Pickles: Does my hon. Friend believe that the level of charging in Lambeth has anything to do with the way in which that council is run? Does he agree that the way in which an authority responds to allegations of maladministration and corruption is an indication of how it is run? Has my hon. Friend seen the recent report of the district auditor and has he noticed, in particular, that the officers of the council who were found guilty of fraud are still employed by it and that the direct labour organisation, having been set standards by the council to fulfil, failed to meet them but has still had its contract extended?

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not making a speech, he is asking a direct question to the Minister. This is not speech time, it is Question Time.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The news that Lambeth council had been guilty of mismanagement did not exactly burst on the world with all the surprise of the sun rising in the east. The fact of the matter is that the sorry catalogue of mismanagement, shortfalls and fiddles is probably unrivalled by any other local authority. That reflects on the officers and councillors, past and present. The people who pay the bill, are, of course, the poor people who paid the bill under rates, the community charge and now under the council tax, the residents of Lambeth.

Mr. Straw: Since the Minister is so keen on facts, has he forgotten the fact that the average household council tax under Labour is £14 less than under the Conservatives? Has he forgotten the second fact that people believed us and not them? Has he forgotten the third fact that the Conservatives had the biggest drubbing that they have had this century in the shire county elections and the fourth fact that Labour, as a result of the confidence shown by the electors in its councils, has never had a better base in the county councils than now?

Why does not the Minister admit that the reason why the council tax in Wandsworth is so low is that it has taken £30 million, one eleventh of the entire nation's transitional relief, unto itself? Does not the United-Secretary understand that that kind of blatant vote-buying in Wandsworth by Ministers sets a poor example for the standards of public life that they should be setting across the country?

Mr. Squire: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman continues to peddle the long-discredited line about Labour councils being cheaper, when the House knows that that is an artificial and false calculation. As for what I took to be the hon. Gentleman's central point, I remind him that the total external support per head going to Wandsworth amounts to £842 and to Lambeth, £1,118. Those are massive figures and show the difference in support. They underline what my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said—the abuse of money by Lambeth is at the heart of the problem.

Empty Council Homes

7. **Mr. Hargreaves:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list the 20 local authorities with the highest number of empty council homes.

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction (Sir George Young): At the risk of spoiling a game that I know the House enjoys playing, I shall say in advance that the 20 local authorities with the highest number of properties empty for management reasons at 1 April 1992 —whose names I shall shortly read out quickly—are, with two exceptions, controlled not by the Conservative party or the Liberal Democrats, but by the Labour party. They are: Manchester, Hackney, Sheffield, Southwark, Newcastle upon Tyne, Liverpool, Lambeth, Birmingham, Leeds, Tower Hamlets, Salford, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Brent, Bradford, Kirklees, Nottingham, Bristol, Camden and Islington.

Mr. Hargreaves: My hon. Friend said that the authorities were predominantly Labour controlled. Does he agree that the list shows that the problem is one of mismanagement, once again? One way to correct the management would be for local authorities not to use direct labour organisations to carry out their repairs.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. Those figures relate to properties that are empty for management reasons and exclude properties that have been empty for other reasons. There are ways in which local authorities can make progress. The Housing and Urban Development Bill, which is now before the House, will oblige local authorities to put housing management out to compulsory competitive tendering, which will benefit tenants by providing higher standards of service than many of them have to put up with at present.

Mr. Betts: Is it not time that the Minister stopped using spurious and bogus figures? Should he not use figures to show the percentage of vacant properties, not absolute figures which do not take into account the size of the housing stock? Should he not use figures that do not include properties to be demolished or to undergo major refurbishment? Is the Minister aware that Sheffield has 1,800 vacant properties, of which 500 are due for demolition and 300 are due for major refurbishment? Once those are taken out of account, it means that 1·4 per cent. of the authority's properties are vacant—less than the 2 per cent. Government target figure. Is it not time that the Minister praised authorities such as Sheffield instead of condemning them as he does?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman was not listening to the answer that I gave. The figures that I have given relate to properties that are empty for management reasons and exclude properties that are about to be demolished. I shall answer questions that are tabled. The question tabled today asked me to list the local authorities with the highest number of empty council houses, and I answered that question. If the hon. Gentleman wants to ask for percentages, he should do so—then he will receive the answer.

Sir Anthony Durant: I note that Lambeth once again appeared on that list—what can the Government do about the council? I am a resident there and the council has failed to collect £173 million in taxes. Is it not time to put in commissioners to sort the place out?

Sir George Young: I hope that my hon. Friend will join me and other Conservative Members when, in less than 12 months' time, we go around the streets of Lambeth to bring home to the residents exactly what the present administration is costing them and persuade them to vote for Conservative councillors who will run Lambeth extremely well, as they did from 1968 to 1971.

Mr. Soley: The Minister says that the problem is due to incompetence. What does he say to the Conservative Government, 13 per cent. of whose properties are empty? When I first drew attention to the matter several years ago, 16 per cent. were empty. Of the empty properties, 18 per cent. belong to the Department of the Environment—the Minister's own Department. In Biggin Hill, boarded-up houses belonging to the Government are up for sale, so depressing the housing market, while Conservative Bromley council has forced taxpayers to put their hands in their pockets in order to keep people in unsatisfactory temporary accommodation. Why do all of us have to pay for the most incompetent landlord of all—the Government—13 per cent. of whose properties are empty? The Government make homeless people and taxpayers pay for the disgrace of homelessness.

Sir George Young: The Department of the Environment has 20 empty properties. The hon. Gentleman cannot seek an alibi for the incompetence of Labour-controlled local authorities by sheltering behind the Ministry of Defence, which owns properties for the use of service men and their families and which, for operational reasons, must keep a number of vacancies.

Local authorities build houses for people in housing need and they have no operational excuse for the high number of voids to which I just referred.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the top 10 councils have 11,000 empty properties between them? That is more than double the number of homeless people in London and the south-east of England. What pressure will my hon. Friend put on councils to bring those properties back into use?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes the valid point that 7,500 families could be taken out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation if more local authorities were to act responsibly and efficiently and manage their homes more effectively. The subsidy system does, indeed, put pressure on local authorities to reduce the number of voids. If one looks at the progress that has been made over the past three or four years, one sees that the pressure is now working and that the number of voids is coming down.

Mr. Straw: Is the Minister aware that, with regard to the proportion of homes available to let, or available to let after minor repairs, five of the worst 10 authorities are Conservative controlled? They include the London borough of Redbridge. If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about appalling housing management in central Government—let us for a moment forget about the Ministry of Defence—let him consider the Department of Health's 14,000 homes that are empty, 15 per cent. of the total, and the Department of Transport's 666 homes that are vacant, 20 per cent. of the total.

The hon. Gentleman likes to lecture local authorities. When will he lecture Conservative Ealing, in his constituency, which has a higher proportion of empty homes available to let than have Blackburn, Sheffield, Coventry, Salford, Manchester and 330 other councils? The Minister ought to put his own house in order before lecturing others.

Sir George Young: Of all the spurious statistics I have ever seen, the list that the hon. Gentleman published this morning takes the biscuit. I am surprised that he was able to keep a straight face while asking that question. Of his top five worst councils, four have transferred their stock to housing associations, and four, between them, have 13 empty houses. According to the hon. Gentleman's twisted logic, those four authorities are worse performers than Lambeth, which has 1,000 voids. The hon. Gentleman tests the credulity of the House and of the country if he seeks to persuade us that Suffolk, Coastal is less efficient than Hackney or Lambeth.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend note that Hackney, Lambeth and Liverpool councils, all of which are on his list, are examples of extreme corruption? Is not it high time for a royal commission to investigate corruption in local government under socialism?

Sir George Young: The remit of any such commission would be far wider than the humble responsibilities of the Minister with responsibility for housing. However, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will take note of my hon. Friend's suggestion.

TUPE Regulations

8. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has held on the operation in local government of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. and learned Friend has had a number of discussions about this matter. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment set out the Government's position on 11 March.

Ms Jackson: Have not the Government failed to honour their obligation, under the acquired rights directive, to protect the rights of workers? Indeed, they face an action on this very issue in the European Court. Can the Minister give the House a guarantee that his Department will ensure that the transfer of undertakings provisions are no longer used to force workers to accept pay reductions and a worsening of their conditions of employment or get the sack? Or is he determined that his Department will play its full part in the Government's plans to turn this country into the sweat shop of Europe?

Mr. Redwood: What an absurd question. The hon. Lady knows well that the Government will obey the law —the European directive and the British law as approved by the House of Commons. Will the hon. Lady and her party agree that competive tendering in local government gives value for money and better quality service? Is the Labour party aware that the auditor for Lambeth pointed out that, had it been competitively tendered, £20 million of work would have saved the taxpayers of Lambeth £5 million? Is the Labour party saying that the people of Lambeth and elsewhere should be denied that money because councils do not follow the rule of law?

Mr. Matthew Banks: Does my hon. Friend agree that the application of TUPE varies from case to case and that, contrary to the misleading impression which may have been created, unless there is a substantial transfer of personnel and premises, there are no transfers of undertakings as a result of the entirely appropriate policy of compulsory competive tendering?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right; we need to look at matters case by case. He is also right to infer that many hundreds of successful competitive tenders have been organised in local government without the regulations being deemed to aply. As a result, many taxpayers have a better deal, many better quality services are provided and in some cases people have more rewarding jobs as well.

Mr. Henderson: If the Minister wants to save public money through competitive tendering, is he aware that much public money is not being saved because of the confusion that is apparent in Government Departments? Is he aware that the civil service has been told by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that the acquired rights directive, which can protect conditions of employment, should apply to contracted-out jobs, yet his Department gives the opposite advice and says that the directive need not apply? Does the Minister accept that he is rapidly becoming marooned on a dated and

objectionable policy? Will he tell the House today that all Government Departments, including his own, will apply the rule of law?

Mr. Redwood: I have already told the House that we intend to apply the rule of law, as we have been doing. Had the hon. Gentleman listened to my answer, he would have heard me say that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment have worked together on the guidance and advice. On 11 March, they issued guidance and advice that represent the Government's position. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would read it. It is clear, good advice which can provide value for money for central and local taxpayers.

London Boroughs (Grant)

9. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the respective levels of central Government grant per household to the London boroughs of *(a)* Hackney and *(b)* Wandsworth.

Mr. Robin Squire: The amount of external support—that is, revenue support grant plus non-domestic rates plus inner-London education grant—per household is £3,159 for Hackney and £1,984 for Wandsworth.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures show yet again that poor quality of service and high costs, such as apply in the Labour borough of Hackney, have nothing to do with the level of Government grant and everything to do with the failure to improve services and efficiency? If local authorities want to emulate Conservative boroughs such as Wandsworth, they should bring in efficiency savings, cut out fraud and stop Labour councillors claiming expenses at the rate of £300 a week, or £15,000 a head a year, money which would be better spent on people in need in their areas.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend, who is very knowledgeable on these matters, made a number of telling points. He might also have pointed out that local authorities could also emulate the example of Wandsworth council in its collection record for the community charge. Hackney, in particular, has a poor collection performance: in the past two years, it was 53 per cent. and 57 per cent.; in the current year, it expects to collect only 91 per cent.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that although he and his hon. Friends may wish to concentrate on a few examples of local authorities in London, the people who are informed about local government and councillors of all persuasions in urban areas of England outside London are convinced that the Government's disregard for unemployment and economic reality in their calculation of grants to local authorities is little better than corrupt?

Mr. Squire: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman spoilt his question in the last part of it. As he knows, the Government are carefully reviewing the standard spending assessments and we are receiving submissions from councils of all political parties. We are carefully considering those submissions and meeting councillors as well. There is no question of the current system being corrupt. It is trying to do what is arguably absolutely impossible, which is to deliver a distribution mechanism that is approved by all local authorities. We seek to make it recapture the inevitable expense faced by authorities. The system does that at present, and if it can do it even better in future, I shall be very pleased.

Construction Industry

10. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the results of the current review of his Department's role as sponsoring Department for the construction industry.

Mr. Howard: The review is due to be completed next month and I expect to announce the results shortly thereafter.

Mr. Winterton: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that trade associations and the many hon. Members who support the objectives of the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance look to his Department not just to regulate the construction industry but to encourage it? Does he accept that his Department could act positively by removing administrative burdens, abolishing the archaic stamp duty on the sale of new houses and investing substantially in the improvement and modernisation of our housing stock and in major development projects?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his characteristically modest shopping list. I entirely accept that part of my Department's duty is to encourage the construction industry. We are certainly doing that and I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming today's extremely encouraging news that total construction orders in the first quarter of this year were 22 per cent. up on the previous quarter.

Mr. Morley: If the Minister wants to support the construction industry, why has he not removed the completely insane rules that prevent local councils from spending capital receipts from council house sales on building and renovating much-needed homes? In Glanford and Scunthorpe, which are not regarded as high-stress areas, investment by housing associations is very low. Both those councils, one of them Tory controlled, could advantageously use their capital receipts to provide decent homes and building jobs and provide support for the construction industry.

Mr. Howard: I am astonished by the hon. Gentleman's question because, of course, from this year councils can use all their capital receipts for the purposes to which he referred. The councils that complained most in the past about their inability to spend capital receipts almost always did not take advantage of the extent to which they were permitted, even under the old rules, to spend those receipts. The hon. Gentleman should have had regard to the facts before he put his question.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important that local construction and building companies in areas such as mine should have a fair opportunity to compete for council work? I welcome the Department's current review of Canterbury city council and nine others to discover why their direct labour organisations are making such enormous losses. I refer my right hon. and learned Friend to the fact that 15 of the last 19 major contracts were given to the DLO, although in not one of them did the DLO offer the best tender.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to these matters. We are reviewing them and shall do so carefully to make sure that the people of Canterbury do not lose as a consequence of any failure by the city council to follow the rules.

Housing Estates

11. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide local authorities with additional resources for the refurbishment and redesign of housing estates.

Mr. Baldry: We provide substantial resources to local authorities every year for capital spending on housing. The housing investment programme for this year is £1·75 billion, and a further £356 million is provided for the estate action programme and £87 million for housing action trusts. Local authorities may also draw on almost all capital receipts generated before the end of this year, which provides them with a major opportunity for additional spending on housing projects.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister admit that he is involved in the ridiculous business of giving with one hand and taking away with the other? An excellent local authority that I visited recently had a scheme to develop an estate, not least with a view to preventing crime, for which some money for phase 1 has been obtained from the Government. A cut in the authority's capital budget brought about by the Department meant that it has lost even more than it had gained from the grant. What would the Minister say to that authority? Is not that a ridiculous Government recycling operation that constrains councils and prevents them from doing what is needed in their communities?

Mr. Baldry: What the hon. Gentleman says does not accord with the facts. This year, 167 new estate action schemes will be started. There are 225 existing schemes, many of which involve extensive estate refurbishment over a number of years. The regeneration of those estates will cost millions of pounds. We are investing in many of the worst run-down estates in the country. We are determined to ensure that every housing estate is brought up to a very good standard.

Sir Donald Thompson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the estate action schemes that he has initiated in my constituency—in Brighouse, Elland and Todmorden. Many of those initiatives will stop estates from declining to the stage that has been reached in other parts of the country.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Estate action schemes also enable tenants to become much more involved in the running of their estates. The means and the resources that we are providing ensure that tenants have a much greater influence over the homes and the areas in which they live.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister not accept that the reality is that many excellent estate action schemes have been put in jeopardy because insufficient capital resources have been provided to enable local authority grant applications to be met in full? In many cases, central Government assumptions about anticipated capital receipts led to grants being made that were far below what local authorities had hoped to get. In housing partnership schemes, bids totalled £142 million, but grants amounted to only 20·71 per cent. of that total. Does the Minister not accept that estate action schemes cannot be carried out if local authorities do not have the money?

Mr. Baldry: Last year, Burnley had an estate action scheme for the Bardon estate. This year, Burnley has had money for an estate action scheme for the Trafalgar Gardens estate. The reality is that this year 167 new estate action schemes will be started and we are investing £356 million in those schemes. About £1 billion has been invested in recent years in estate action, which has enabled estate action schemes to be carried out on no fewer than 1,000 estates.

Local Authorities (Powers)

12. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of County Councils to discuss the powers of local authorities.

Mr. Howard: The ACC has not asked for such a discussion. The next of my regular informal two-monthly meetings with the chairmen of the three local authority associations will take place on 7 June, and the ACC is at liberty to raise this or any other issue it wishes at that meeting.

Mr. Jones: Have not the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his Government set out deliberately to undermine county government? Why did the Government not listen to the warnings from the counties that the poll tax—the right hon. and learned Gentleman's biggest mistake—would end in tears? Why does he not take this opportunity—his last appearance at the Dispatch Box as Secretary of State for the Environment—to acknowledge that he was wrong on the poll tax? As a Llanelli boy, born and bred, would he not say that he is in some small danger of exchanging his present post with that of the Secretary of State for Wales?

Mr. Howard: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has to go back to the community charge because he finds so little in contemporary policies of which he can complain. When the Opposition go back to the community charge, we know that they are absolutely bereft of contemporary issues that they can raise.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: When considering the powers of local authorities, will my right hon. and learned Friend give some thought to the needs of people who live in areas such as Hackney and Lambeth, which are bywords for inefficiency and incompetence and, often, for corruption? Given the fact that Lambeth—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not in order. If he relates his question to the Association of County Councils and the powers of local authorities, he must be heard, but questions must be in order.

Mr. Coombs: When discussing the matter with the Association of County Councils, will my right hon. and learned Friend place much stronger emphasis on the possibility of bringing in special commissioners to deal with councils where the ratepayer is not properly protected from the depredations of councils such as Lambeth and Hackney?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction pointed out a few moments ago, voters in the areas to which my hon. Friend has referred will have their opportunity within months to make it clear at the ballot box that they want no more of the disreputable government from which they suffered at Labour's hands.

Mr. Vaz: The Secretary of State may be about to lose his voice, but I hope that he has not lost his memory. Does he not remember what happened on 6 May? Does he not agree that Labour's stunning success in the recent county council elections and the humiliating defeat of the Conservatives represent a powerful message from the electors of Britain, who do not want local government to be kicked around by the present Administration?

Will the Secretary of State give the House an undertaking in regard to the Government's crude attempt to undermine local democracy and weaken the process of local accountability? He knows that, since 1979, 145 Acts of Parliament have been passed to curtail the powers of democratically elected local councils. Is not the true message of 6 May that power must be handed back to the people and taken away from the bureaucracy of central Government?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that, far from undermining local government, we have given it new powers and responsibilities. Far from imposing new controls on local government, one of the first things that the Government did in 1980 was sweep away 300 detailed controls on local government. Things may be different in Leicester, but I have never heard this issue raised on the doorstep.

Mr. Gallie: When considering the affairs of local authorities with the Association of County Councils, will my right hon. and learned Friend ascertain whether it has ever discussed local authorities' input with regard to security in prisons in their areas? Is he aware that yesterday five prisoners—serious offenders—escaped from Saughton prison—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House is obviously demob-happy; it had better pull itself together. Let us move on to a question from another Scot.

Ozone Layer

13. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further steps Her Majesty's Government proposes to take to combat the depletion of the ozone layer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: These Scots get everywhere.

The Government are committed to phasing out ozone-depleting substances as quickly as possible. I will be arguing strongly for tighter controls of hydrochlorofluorocarbons and methyl bromide within the European Community than those in the Montreal protocol.

Mr. Kirkwood: What the Government have done today is, of course, welcome. Is the Minister aware, however, that, despite the diplomatic and political moves that have been made, the scientific community is still extremely concerned about whether we are moving far and fast enough to deal with the degradation of the ozone layer? Will he consider working with his opposite numbers at the Department of Trade and Industry in trying to take practical steps, such as encouraging the manufacture of propane refrigerators in this country? Many such refrigerators are manufactured in Germany, and they will be imported in great numbers if we do not wake up to the opportunities available in this country.

Mr. Maclean: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about our diplomatic and ministerial progress in negotiations. The Copenhagen agreement, which we reached last November, had a phase-out date of 2030 for HCFCs; I shall be arguing for an ultimate phase-out date of 2015, at the latest.

The hon. Gentleman is right: we should urge manufacturers to look at the size of the green market. The DTI and the Department of the Environment have jointly set up JEMU—the joint environmental markets unit. The unit, which is staffed by civil servants from the two Departments, is looking for market opportunities for a new green technology, both overseas and in this country.

I am well aware of the existence of German propane refrigerators and, in speeches, I have taken every opportunity to urge our manufacturers to beware of the threat of such technology and to beat our competitors.

Sir Giles Shaw: Will my hon. Friend note that in many other countries—for example, the United States and Japan—legislation is passed to create markets that industrialists can then follow, such as catalytic converters for cars, in which Johnson Matthey had a world lead? Britain has nothing so persuasive as the legislation in the United States or Japan; if it did, that would help to increase our domestic technology.

Mr. Maclean: I accept that in certain circumstances creating a high target or objective, or even introducing regulation, can lead the market in a particular direction. However, I am much more concerned to point out to British industry that we expect the size of the global market in environmental goods and technology to rise to $300 billion by the turn of the century. That is larger than the world's global aerospace market.

The opportunities are immense and I should prefer British industry to get there through persuasion. From the conferences I have attended and the discussions that I have had with representatives of British industry, I believe that they recognise the size of that market. It is better to liberate industry to capture that market than to smother it in regulation.

Ms Short: Will the Minister confirm that depletion of the ozone layer led to a 40 per cent. increase in skin cancer in Britain between 1979 and 1991? Are not there now 28,000 cases a year, with the numbers rising? As well as supporting the most stringent conditions in the forthcoming EC directive, will the hon. Gentleman institute a programme of public education so that the public are aware of the need to protect themselves and their children from the growing risk of skin cancer caused by depletion of the ozone layer?

Mr. Maclean: I am glad that someone has raised the shibboleth of skin cancer in the northern hemisphere as a consequence of depletion of the ozone layer. The fact is that depletion of the ozone layer in the northern hemisphere occurs only in winter and spring—February, March and into April. Because at that time of the year the

angle of the sun is so low on the horizon, there is very little extra ultraviolet radiation coming through. The danger arises for those who take holidays in very sunny climates.

I have researched a statistic which I think the House will appreciate and which we can all understand. To get the same dose of radiation and sunburn, a person would need to spend only one hour around the pool on the Costa Brava, while in Britain in February that person would need to spend 10 hours nude sunbathing in Birmingham.

Science, Engineering and Technology

3.32 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. William Waldegrave): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about Government policy on science, engineering and technology.

Following the debate in this House last June, I launched a consultation exercise about the future of science and technology in this country. That produced more than 800 responses. Many were of high quality, not least those submitted by the Science and Technology Committee in another place and the new Science and Technology Committee of this House, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw).

Very many of the responses I received from industry affirmed the quality of Britain's scientists and engineers. I believe that I speak for the whole House in saying that I agree with that judgment. I hope that I will also speak for the whole House when I add to that my belief that on those scientists and engineers rests a very large part of our hopes for the future of our country. They represent one of our fundamental national assets. The Government now wish to build on that national strength by developing a closer and more systematic partnership between the scientific and engineering communities, industry and commerce, and Government. The purpose of that new partnership will be the strengthening of the contribution of science and engineering to wealth creation and the quality of life. That is the focus for the White Paper, "Realising Our Potential, a Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology", which we are publishing today. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The principal themes that emerged from the consultation exercise were as follows. First, there was a widely perceived contrast between our continued excellence in science, engineering and technology and our relative weakness in exploiting it, especially to economic advantage. Secondly, many felt the absence of a clear statement of national strategy in that area. Thirdly, many felt that there was a need to manage the Government's investment in science and technology better.

The proposals in the White Paper address those themes and some others that are complementary to them. First, we have decided to provide a clear, annually updated, statement of the Government's strategy for science and technology, to be known as "The Forward Look". That will give an assessment of the balance and content of our science and technology programmes over the medium and longer term.

"The Forward Look" will draw on the results of our second innovation—a new technology foresight exercise, to be jointly conducted by industry, the science and engineering communities and Government Departments. The aims of the exercise—which reflects best practice in our leading companies and in other advanced countries—are to gain early notice of emerging key technologies and to provide a systematic process for the exchange of ideas, people and know-how. It will be steered by a group chaired by the chief scientific adviser and will aim to bring together working scientists and engineers with those in industry and commerce who are close to markets. Reflecting that and the other increased responsibilities laid upon him by the White Paper, I should tell the House that the Government's chief scientific adviser will in future be paid at the grade 1A level.

Thirdly, we have decided to establish a new council for science and technology—which I shall chair on behalf of the Prime Minister—to provide the Government with independent and expert advice at the highest level on research spending priorities. That will replace the present ACOST. We shall also look to the newly established National Academies Policy Advisory Group as an authoritative source of independent advice.

The Government believe that we need to clarify what we expect from scientists and engineers in universities and research council institutes in relation to the creation of wealth and improvement of our quality of life. Therefore, we intend to restructure the research councils, to reformulate their missions and strengthen their links with those who use their research, and to improve their management arrangements.

In particular, the Government wish to build on the steps taken by the present Science and Engineering Research Council to develop structures more clearly related to the needs of users of research. I have therefore decided that the Science and Engineering Research Council should be divided into two new councils: an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, which will underpin key industries based on engineering and the physical sciences, and a Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council. The Agricultural and Food Research Council will be modified into a Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, reflecting the increasing importance of the life sciences. The coverage of the Natural Environment Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council will remain broadly as it is now.

Reflecting advice given in the consultation process, the functions of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils will be absorbed within the Office of Science and Technology.

Next, the Government's arrangements for the promotion of innovation, for technology transfer and the spread of best practice will be substantially strengthened, taking account of the Faraday principles on the interchange of ideas, know-how and skills. Access to technology will be improved, irrespective of its source, for firms of all sizes. The secretariat of the LINK programme will be transferred from the DTI to my Department to emphasise the importance of its role in bringing the science base and industry together.

The Government have reviewed the dual support mechanism under which funding for research in universities is provided through both the higher education funding councils and the research councils. We have concluded that uncertainty about its future should be ended. Funding for teaching and general research should continue to flow together. We have therefore decided that the present dual funding arrangements should be retained. Arrangements for co-ordination with the science and engineering base will be strengthened to ensure that the funding councils and the research councils establish close co-ordination.

The Government wish the research councils and universities to develop research training more closely related to the needs of potential employers and designed to encourage young people to see science and engineering careers as worth while and attractive. That will involve

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

further development of the content of postgraduate courses and changes in the balance of the support provided by the research councils, with a masters course becoming the normal initial postgraduate degree in science, engineering and technology. More care should be taken to manage the careers of those postgraduates who go on to do academic research.

During the past 20 years the Rothschild customer-contractor principle has been successfully applied in the management of Departments' spending on the research and development that is directly related to the support of their policies. The Government now wish further to strengthen the role of Departments as customers for research and development and to create a fully open market for the provision of research and development to Departments, so that all competent contractors can compete for work. Further work is therefore being set in hand on the best ownership and organisational arrangements for civil research establishments in the public sector.

The Government also recognise that science and technology must now be seen in a global perspective. Co-operation with other countries is essential and the United Kingdom will play its full role while aiming to improve our take-up of research carried out overseas.

Our future depends on the effective exploitation of science and technology. That is not just a question of producing excellently educated and trained scientists, engineers and technicians at all levels, crucial though that is. We need also to ensure that our society as a whole appreciates the role and importance of mathematics, science, engineering and technology. The Government intend to raise the profile of the work presently done to improve public understanding of science. We will do this by extending our partnership with the charities and other bodies which are already doing much good work in the schools and elsewhere. I shall be committing additional funds from my budget to that purpose.

The White Paper sets out the framework within which we can better develop and exploit the work of our many excellent scientists and engineers in industry, the academic community and Government. It represents the beginning of a process of change, not the end. I am confident that we shall have the backing of British industry and of those who work in our science and engineering base in building the stronger partnership that is crucial to Britain's success. It is a strategy that is indeed designed to realise our potential, and I commend it to the House.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): A year ago, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster promised us the White Paper, which he has finally seen fit to present to the House today; a further year of wasted opportunity, dithering and delay; a further year of recession, rising unemployment and contraction of our manufacturing base. The White Paper fails to meet expectations on almost every key issue facing British science and engineering today.

We welcome the right hon. Gentleman's commitment to an annual assessment of Government strategy, but there are no new resources available to meet even the limited objectives laid out in the White Paper. There is no new system for underpinning technology transfer and near-market research, and there is no hope for the thousands of young scientists existing on a pittance while studying for their higher degrees, and no solution for the slightly older men and women who are stuck on the research ladder with short-term contracts and no prospect of a permanent position. Without those key commitments, the right hon. Gentleman has no chance of success; he is building castles in the air.

We welcome the few positive measures within the White Paper. Unification of the science advisory councils makes sense, but why has the Advisory Board for Research Councils' function been merely internalised? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether, in keeping with his supposed commitment to open government, all advisory papers and recommendations will be made public?

The right hon. Gentleman intends to reorganise the research councils on the most dubious of premises, but finds no room for a research council for the humanities, despite the advice that he has had on the subject. Why not?

We welcome the introduction of an MSc as a standard step on the road to a research doctorate. Will that new degree be fully funded and, if not, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that there will be a consequent reduction in the number of PhD awards? Does he accept that that is no substitute for a full review of career prospects in research?

We have argued for the separation of international subscriptions from the research council budget and therefore support the right hon. Gentleman's proposal to do so, as we also support his new responsibilities for teaching company and LINK schemes. Does he accept that that still leaves four fifths of Government spending on research and development outwith his control, which weakens his position?

We welcome his belated acceptance of the need for Government support for near-market research. Will he explain how he proposes to achieve that using a departmental committee, without new resources, without any semblance of a regional policy and without any infrastructure of support for technology transfer?

Why will he not agree to consider the creation of intermediate research centres or Faraday institutes? What is the point of merely talking about a Faraday concept? Why has he not considered awarding tax credits for additional research and development, which are proven to have a beneficial effect? Where is there any commitment to increase Government spending on research and development?

Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that promises of support for technology and research foresight will be ill received while his colleague, the President of the Board of Trade, proceeds with the closure of the Warren Spring laboratory? Does he accept that he in turn will cause dismay in other research establishments by his allusion to further market testing?

We have waited a long time for the White Paper, and its lack of concrete proposals is all the more telling for that. The right hon. Gentleman has shown that, although he may be a good listener, he is not prepared to take the advice offered. In the context of our present economic plight, the White Paper is a complete failure. In the eyes of the science community, it will be a bitter disappointment, and to the country at large just what it has come to accept as normal from this useless Government.

The truth is that the Government still have no science policy. We need a Government with a commitment to science, technology transfer and better trained and better

paid scientists. Instead, the statement condemns us to hobble into the future with an underfunded science base and fewer scientists, because of the Government's failure to invest in our future.

Mr. Waldegrave: I was going to, and will still, congratulate the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) on his first appearance on the Front Bench to reply to a statement. However, I shall not congratulate him on the fact that he has the tone and content completely wrong. I was hoping not to have to respond to the type of cheap party points that the hon. Gentleman has made but, as he wants to play it at that level, let me tell him that a representative of the Save British Science campaign told my office that he thought that the Labour party's document—the hon. Gentleman's document—was "pathetic". That is fair.

Before the hon. Gentleman's colleagues start talking about money, let me remind him that the document's opening sally is the immensely patronising remark:

"Too many organisations simply stated the case for more money."

That is the Labour party's response to every issue. It is a poor document, and the best thing to do with it is put it aside. The hon. Gentleman may not have read it—perhaps he did not write it—because it recommends the internalisation of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the four fifths of Government spending which is outside my Department. Is he recommending a centralised department to control the whole spend of Government on science and technology and applied R and D? I do not think that there is such a department anywhere in the world, and it would be a very foolish Government who set one up. It is a weak and odd argument.

The hon. Gentleman did not refer to the research foresight exercise—perhaps he does not know what it is. We recently published a paper produced by the science policy research unit at Sussex university, which I commend to him. It will show him how we are now joining the majority of countries in carrying out a proper critical technology foresight exercise.

As for intermediate institutes, I recommend the hon. Gentleman to make a short journey down the road to Imperial college to see the interdisciplinary research centre. We have intermediate institutes, and it is not sensible to add to the institutional structure when we should be trying to bring the whole of our capacity for science and engineering closer to industry. That is the purpose of the White Paper, which I believe he will find is widely welcomed in the community. In the weeks ahead, he will find that he has misjudged the opinion of those whom he should have consulted. If that document is all that he could produce at the end of 12 months, he should read more accurately what we have produced. The purpose of the White Paper is to give a lead and a focus to our national strategy for science and engineering. That is what it will do, and I believe that it will be widely welcomed by others wiser than the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Order. Exchanges between the two Front Benches have taken about 20 minutes, and many hon. Members are seeking to ask questions. I therefore look for brief questions and answers.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Unlike the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the publication of his White Paper. I congratulate him, too, on the fact that my right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Education have been with him on the Front Bench, which reflects the crucial nature of the decision that he has made.

I welcome the White Paper both for its broad scope and for its focus on priorities. In questioning my right hon. Friend on what he has said at this juncture, may I ask that the partnership that he seeks might include the House, too, and the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which I have the honour to chair?

Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to ensure that, when the annual "Foward Look" is debated in the House, we shall be able to see not only what the priorities are but where the funding will flow to ensure that those priorities are achieved, so that the forward look that he seeks to implement will be fully costed and fully accepted as part of the policy that he has engendered?

Finally, is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the mechanism for the assessment, as between the chief scientific adviser and his other colleagues in the operating Departments, will indeed lead to a joint commitment to joint objectives that represent the priorities for science?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right; our purpose is indeed to meet his third point. On his first point, my hon. Friend has noticed the fundamental fact that we shall now have a proper opportunity in the House for annual debate and analysis of the science and engineering strategy of the country, on the basis of the forward look. I believe that the two Select Committees will be major contributors.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Education and the President of the Board of Trade are here—as, indeed, is my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, the home of many formidable scientific and engineering institutions. My right hon. Friends' presence here represents the Government's commitment, and the building of a new strategy of partnership between industry and the science base.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster accept that, notwithstanding one or two welcome parts of it, his statement promised a great deal but delivered very little? Does he not accept that, in two crucial areas, the statement was most disappointing? First, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why he has ducked the issue of funding? Is he not concerned that, with the exception of Turkey, this country is the only OECD country in which research and development funding has declined as a percentage of GDP? Does he not agree with his right hon. Friend who is now the President of the Board of Trade, who in 1989 wrote in his book that that trend must be reversed?

Secondly, does the Chancellor of the Duchy not accept that the issue of innovation, which it was promised would be the crucial part of the statement, has fared badly? After all, innovation is the key to Britain's future. Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us why it has not had the high status that it deserves? Is it because, yet again, he has failed to get his act together with the Department of Trade and Industry?

Mr. Waldegrave: If the hon. Gentleman read my statement through, and read the White Paper too, he would find that my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry are indeed raising the profile of innovation work. The President of the Board of Trade will today issue plans that will concentrate the innovation work where it should be concentrated, in small to medium-sized firms, which is where market failure can take place. When the hon. Gentleman considers such matters at rather more leisure, he will find that we have clear plans for improving innovation and the transfer of technology between the science base and industry.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, or should know, that there is an annual cycle for funding, and we do not announce funding decisions ad hoc in White Papers. Over the past 14 years, the Government have protected the science base in real terms—which, incidentally, is more than the Labour party did all those decades ago. Our commitment to funding these policies properly is set out clearly in the White Paper.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Will my right hon. Friend accept a welcome for his statement? We look forward to reading the White Paper. In the meantime, can he explain a little further how he will liaise with such bodies as the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, which had such a good seminar on this subject, the Academy of Engineering and well established engineering schools such as that at Sussex university to which he referred and whose science policy research unit has already had input?

Mr. Waldegrave: I pay tribute to the science policy research unit, because I made considerable use of its advice in the writing of this White Paper. We commissioned a specific paper from the unit as part of the background. Many hon. Members will agree that the RSA has been one of the most useful national forces, perhaps especially for the meeting of the sciences and the humanities, and I welcome that.

Today, I shall emphasise the importance that we attach to the initiative taken by the other royal society, the Royal, the Academy of Engineering and the royal colleges, which are setting up for the first time in the United Kingdom a combined policy advisory group—if you like, the academy of academies based on the American model. It will give us the capacity to have united advice that is truly independent from outside, and I welcome that. We shall work with it and listen closely to its advice.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): While the Chancellor has been making some minor administrative arrangements in his office, has he done anything for the role of science and technology in British industry, which is so necessary? The President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Education are here, but where is the Secretary of State for Defence? Has the Chancellor won any battles with them? Where is the Met Office? Where is its essential contribution to global climate research? Why is Britain the only country in the world that has left its Met Office in the hands of the Ministry of Defence?

In terms of the research councils, why has he abolished the ABRC, only to internalise it in his Department, so that the advice of scientists will be buried instead of published? Why has he not provided for a regular review of all departmental expenditure on science in the annual public expenditure review? That procedure existed before he took office, but he seems to have abandoned it. Is he aware that he has not so much rearranged the deckchairs on the Titanic as allowed them to collapse?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman drafted his question some time ago. He may not have read, as many others have not, the Labour party's statement on this. It provides good arguments for bringing the ABRC into my Department, as do the Royal Society and many others who gave us advice.

There will be a gain in openness because, for the first time, "The Forward Look" will contain proper strategic advice and predictions about the looking forward policy. That does not mean that we will in any way abandon the backward-looking account that is published at present—we will continue to publish it. As the hon. Gentleman may know, that looks backwards. The point is that no strategic document that looks forward is published at present, and the innovation will be welcomed.

I did not arrange for the director of the Met Office to be here, and I apologise for that. The Met Office is extremely effective, and there is no overwhelming evidence to change the arrangements with regard to it. It is the source of worldwide admiration.

As for defence, we have relatively recently established the Defence Research Agency, which will not only improve the arrangements in that Department in terms of the scientific advice, the technological advice and the purchasing that is available to the Ministry, but turn out to be a formidable agent for the interaction of technology and the transfer of defence technology to the civil base. That will be a good thing.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his good statement, and, indeed, on upgrading the engineer in the eyes of the United Kingdom. Can I ask him about biotechnology, which is divided between four departments at present and is to be transferred to the AFRC? Is it wise to take it away from the chemical funding that it has received in past years under SERC?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. Engineers will welcome the establishment of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. Industry will also welcome it, because we now have a research council dedicated to the underpinning of those central engineering, electronic and other industries. We have not had that so specifically in the past.

I have listened carefully to the advice about the relocation of the biotechnological and biological sciences. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the industries are split three, if not four, ways at present. I shall shift most of what is presently with SERC to the AFRC and the new BBRC. I have asked Sir David Phillips to preside over a committee that will look at the exact allocations of the transfers in the next few months. There will be close consultation with the experts about them.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): One of the most crucial subjects contained in the White Paper is that of innovation, as several of my hon. Friends have remarked. One of the ways in which Germany has ensured its success in that area is by funding generously a network of Fraunhofer institutes, which carry out that function successfully. Does the Minister feel that that is a good model on which to base the transfer of technology in this

country, and, if so, do the Government have any intention to fund such institutes as generously as the German Government fund theirs?

Mr. Waldegrave: We have studied the Fraunhofer institutes closely, and Sir David Phillips has led a team to look at them. The House of Lords Select Committee, as the hon. Lady no doubt knows, also studied the subject, and it came down against setting up similar institutes. On balance, the Government took the view that the noble Lords were right in that decision.

It is not true that all the German Fraunhofer institutes are successful. There is a wide variation among them. Some are, some are not. Our view was that, rather than doing the characteristically British thing of inventing new institutions, we should do the more difficult but far more important thing and get our science and engineering capacity more closely related to industry. We can do that.

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): My right hon. Friend will be aware that four of the five research councils are headquartered in my constituency. Can he give an assurance to the staff of the research councils that the changes that he has adumbrated this afternoon will not affect them in terms of job losses or relocation to other parts of the United Kingdom? Will the creation of a new research council for particle physics and astronomy be matched by a recognition of the importance of big science internationally, and therefore the need to fund it to cope with the depredations of currency changes such as we have seen in recent years?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is an extremely effective representative of the interests of the research councils based in his constituency. He will not expect me to say that we shall never seek further efficiency gains in the bureaucracy necessary for the distribution of money. It would be wrong of me to do so. If we can do it better, we should. However, nothing inherent in the plans that I have announced today should worry my hon. Friend's constituents.

I pay tribute to Sir Mark Richmond, the chairman of the present SERC, who has worked closely with us in developing this next step. United Kingdom particle physicists and astronomers—we have some extremely good people in both categories, and I name just one at random: Sir Martin Rees of Cambridge—will welcome the proposal that they should have their own base in Britain where they can argue properly the claims of big science openly.

Physicists and astronomers will not have to fight out their claims with the non-comparable smaller sciences within the bigger SERC. They will also see a gain in the fact that such currency fluctuations as affect them—currency fluctuations affect subscriptions, for example, of CERN from time to time—will be shared by the whole science base, which is more than £1 billion, rather than being borne only by CERN. That will give them greater stability.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster seems to have forgotten the objectives of some of his research part of the way through. Will he answer the observation by my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) about Warren Spring? It is an important observation, which puts things into context.

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain what discussions he has had with the Treasury about protection of international projects such as CERN against fluctuations in exchange rates? I congratulate the Chancellor on spelling "Faraday" correctly, unlike his colleague the Prime Minister, who spelt it incorrectly in the press briefing last week. Would the right hon. Gentleman be kind enough to explain to the House precisely what is meant by "taking into account" the Faraday principles on the interchange of ideas, know-how and so on? That was not terribly clear from his statement, and the House deserves an explanation.

Mr. Waldegrave: On Warren Spring, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has not taken any final decision. From time to time, it is necessary to change the administrative structures, but what matters above all is the maintenance of the science and technology capacity that we need in this country.

I answered the point about CERN when I replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). When the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) considers the matter, he will find that there is a considerable advantage, in terms of the exchange rate fluctuations, in spreading the risk, as well as the gain, which sometimes happens, over a wider base.

I know that the hon. Gentleman knows very well what the Faraday principles are, as I do. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales led a high-grade group which produced a report recommending those principles. As I told the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), we endorse those principles, but we do not believe that they should be confined to special institutions. They should be part of the policy steering the entire science and engineering base. That is the point.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my right hon. Friend accept that anyone interested in science will now be absolutely convinced that we have a Government who take science seriously? If there is need of proof of that, it is found in the very fact that we are now to upgrade our chief scientific adviser, so that he will be one of the highest paid civil servants.

Will my right hon. Friend tell me exactly where the new type of research into the scientific aspects necessary for the destruction of nuclear weapons will take place? There is a great need for that work to continue and to assist the Russians in their work in that regard.

Mr. Waldegrave: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments. He is right: the White Paper represents the Government's central commitment to these subjects. My right hon. Friend's second point is also a fair one. Professor Stewart, who is known to many in this House, and is one of the most distinguished people in science, deserves the ranking that goes with his higher pay, because he will be carrying out more extensive duties.

Work is going on in the Ministry of Defence and the Department of the Environment on the destruction of nuclear weapons. Last week, I visited the British Geological Survey, which is the type of high-quality institution whose basic and applied work lies behind the safe disposal of radioactive waste. We should be proud of its capacity to give us professional advice on that matter—advice which it gives around the world.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Why is it that Japanese industry registered 350,000 patents last year, one third of the world total, while the United Kingdom registered a seventh of that number? Why is that, when we have the inventive skills? In this century, we have won 61 Nobel prizes, while Japan has won just four.

How will the White Paper prevent a repeat of the disaster of British technology when one of the five best British inventions of the past 20 years, the transputer, was lost to this country? It was invented in the Chancellor's constituency and mine. If the recommendations in the White Paper had been in place two years ago, would that have prevented the transputer from being stolen from this country to be manufactured in France and Italy?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman should not be too pessimistic. He should remember that we export a higher percentage of our GDP than does Japan. I agree with his fundamental point that we can learn from Japan and other countries. The fundamental approach that Japan has used, ever since the second world war, is based on a systematic survey of the technological advances made in other countries and in its laboratories. That is the very technique which we are borrowing and placing at the centre of our approach. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that—we would not be introducing our plans if there were not improvements to be made.

Everyone in this country knows that we have to bridge the gap between our inventiveness in the laboratory and our effectiveness as marketers of good ideas. That is why we believe that, if we bring people close together at an early stage—as is done in the United States, France, Germany and Japan—we are likely to, indeed we will, gain.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that applied research is vital for the regeneration of our manufacturing base? Why does applied research receive only one tenth the funding of pure research? Will he end the policy whereby the spend on astronomy and nuclear physics is 35 per cent. of all funding, while expenditure on engineering is only 26 per cent? What assurance can he give me and my constituents at Brunel university that engineering will be given the priority that it needs if Britain's industry is to be regenerated?

Mr. Waldegrave: One thing that I have learnt during the extensive consultation that we have had with successful science-based industries in this country is that those industries do not want us to abandon good basic research. When asked, Dr. Richard Sykes, the chief operating officer of Glaxo, replies that what he wants from the country in which he invests—he is free to move his investment anywhere—is well-trained people and good basic research.

I agree with my hon. Friend and with Sir John Fairclough's recent remarks that we took an over-simplified view that we should automatically withdraw Government support from near-market research. We should judge matters on a pragmatic basis, and first consider where the market is failing. We should adopt the approach—set out in the White Paper—of asking whether there is a market failure that matters to this country, then decide whether the Government should act to remedy it within the available resources. We should not withdraw from basic research sectors, where the Government's role is fundamental because industry does not usually play an important part.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I congratulate the Minister on his statements on basic science. Does he agree that the most difficult part of research is the generation of ideas, without which there can be no other research, no matter what other organisations we have? What does the White Paper contain to assist in the generation of ideas, bearing in mind the fact that that requires time and security? Is not the shift towards masters' degrees a retrograde step? Will the masters' degrees be in addition to doctorates or will the number of doctorates available be reduced?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is right on that matter. I take the same view as the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie)—the Labour party document makes the same recommendation. I believe that a better and perhaps wider basis for the beginning of postgraduate training is sensible. Many people start their PhDs without knowing what the postgraduate world is like and sometimes find that they are not in the right place.

Slightly clearer guidance and steerage at the beginning of post-graduate life would be good for those people, some of whom will find that they do not want to go on to obtain a PhD. They will have gained an additional postgraduate qualification, which will be useful to them when they seek jobs in industry.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there were 800 responses to the White Paper? Bearing in mind the strongly held views of Opposition Members, expressed at considerable length by the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), will my right hon. Friend state whether the official Opposition made any submission during the consultation period on the White Paper?

Mr. Waldegrave: It slipped their notice, and I do not think they did—I certainly do not remember it. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), who regularly sends me advice, may have sent a submission, but I do not remember receiving one from the Opposition Front Bench team.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): What does the White Paper contain that is likely to lead to the unification of the engineering profession, which consists of more than 40 different institutions—a direct cause of the lack of esteem and protection of function within engineering and industry? Surely the White Paper must contain something that will put an end to the chaos. Surely it should have addressed the issue of legal protection, with regard to function and title, for the engineering profession. That is the only way in which industry and boardrooms will ever take the profession seriously.

Mr. Waldegrave: I happen to agree with the hon. Gentleman, but it must be for the engineering profession itself to organise its institutions. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Sir John Fairclough is now taking some steps in that direction. It would be wrong for the Government to lay down the law in respect of these matters.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that among Conservative

Members there is strong support not only for his statement, but also for the very pertinent point that has just been made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), with which I heartily agree? Will my right hon. Friend look again at this matter to see whether the Government might exert some influence? The maintenance of dual funding is absolutely essential, for the reasons that he has given—reasons connected with the science base—and will be widely welcomed in the university world.

Mr. Waldegrave: I certainly hear my hon. Friend. Bearing in mind the 100 years, or more, of background to the attempts to unify the engineering industry, as well as the fact that the profession itself now seems to be moving in that direction, it is much better that it should lead.

On the question of dual funding, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It would have been a bad signal to the universities if we had shown that we wanted to divorce teaching and research. The universities have a specific role, not only in teaching and in the creation of a research environment and the transmission of knowledge, but also in picking up original ideas and backing them to the point where the research councils can support them with mission-oriented research funds. Those two roles have been well founded in this country over the years.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The Secretary of State has referred twice to protection of science funding against exchange rate fluctuations. On each occasion, he has said that the scientific community will bear the risk and, possibly, take the gain. Could not the right hon. Gentleman devise a mechanism whereby the Government bore the risk? With exchange rates as they are at present, that would be a safer option for the scientific community.

Mr. Waldegrave: In the end, it is taxpayers' money that has to be spent, and I should think that it is bound to be included in the science budget. I shall not repeat a point that I made earlier, but I shall say that the new arrangements will be better than the existing ones. Ultimately, whether to subscribe to a big international organisation, which might involve us in certain risks, is a judgment to be made by people with science policy responsibilities.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): As the parliamentary member of the Medical Research Council, I welcome the White Paper. My right hon. Friend was good enough to meet a delegation, including myself, from the MRC. I thank him warmly for recognising that the chairmanship and managerial structure of the council are so good that it should be identified for replication. I thank him also for recognising that the concordat between the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health is unique and for suggesting that it too should be replicated by other research councils.

Has he given careful consideration to ways in which European Community research might be furthered and disseminated most effectively? I put that question because I know that Dr. Dai Rees and Dr. David Evered, the Nos. 1 and 2 in the Medical Research Council, as well as the council's chairman, Sir David Plaistow, regard this as a matter of great importance.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend, to whom I pay tribute for her work on the Medical Research Council, has made two perfectly fair points. The Medical Research Council has been a success story. I have sought to replicate elsewhere both the council's structures and the relationship that it has established over the years with pure scientists working in its area and with the industrial base. If industry could achieve relationships such as have been achieved by the purist laboratories under MRC aegis—for example, the laboratory of molecular biology in Cambridge—we should do very well across the frontier.

On the concordats, I agree with my hon. Friend that the clarity of relationship between MRC and the Department of Health is a useful model. Within the constraints of the slightly different relationships with some other research councils, it could be replicated.

On the very important subject of European Community research, I should like to put on record my belief that, although the administration has not always been as good as we should like, the Community has begun seriously to contribute to the welfare of people in Europe. There are good programmes under the third framework programme. I am proud that, proportionately, British scientists win a greater share than those from other countries. We are coming to the negotiation of the fourth framework programme, and we will make a full contribution to the development of strategy under it.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Minister will be aware of the dictum of Lord Porter of Luddenham, a former president both of the Royal Society and of the Royal Society of Chemistry, that

"All chemistry is either applied or not yet applied."

So he will perhaps understand the scepticism about a possible artificial distinction, given the continuum between applied science and the core. Given that, in relation to the splitting of SERC, can the Minister assure the House that the chemistry committee of SERC will remain in its present form?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman's question gives me an opportunity, which I welcome, to clarify an important point. In everything I am doing, I am seeking to avoid the establishment of artificial divisions between applied and basic. I do not believe that those so-called Frascati definitions are necessarily helpful. We had advice, for example from the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology, that we should completely separate the funding of the two. I believe that that would be wrong.

What I am seeking to do, and what I believe we will achieve under the framework that I have set out, is to bring the whole science base, running from the purest through to the applied work, closer to industrial and user decision-taking, because that will benefit both sides.

The benefit to the chemist and the other, in shorthand, small sciences that will come from the division of the research councils will be great. SERC had to make judgments between chalk and cheese, or astronomers and chemists, that were too difficult for it. I see no reason why the chemistry board of SERC should not continue, although it will be for the new chairman and the director of the new Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to make their own disposition.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Speaker: We must move on.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I will take the point of order of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell); it appears to be a point of frustration.

Mr. Dalyell: It is a point of frustration. This is a very important issue. Many of us have spent a great deal of our parliamentary lives on the subject. To cut the contributions is very rough going. Some of my hon. Friends have spent much time on the issue, yet they cannot put questions.

Madam Speaker: It is too large a subject to be left; I am sure that the House will come back to it. I must make the point, reluctantly, that the hon. Gentleman was not in his place in the Chamber for the Minister's statement.

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, I was.

Madam Speaker: Order. He came into the Chamber when the Minister was responding to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As a matter of record, I was in the Chamber for the statement. Then I went out to get the White Paper so that my colleagues and I could check what it said.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I watch very carefully to see that hon. Members who wish to put questions on a statement remain in their places. I have always made that clear.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Spaker: Are there other points of order on that matter?

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I stayed right through the statement and the questions on it. Can you advise me when I may have an opportunity to comment in the House on the White Paper?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the business manager for the Government will give some indication on that. It is not for the Speaker, but no doubt we shall return to the matter. If hon. Members had heeded my earlier caution about brief questions and answers, I might have been able to help all hon. Members who were rising.

Points of Order

3.14 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is genuine, specific and urgent, and is relevant to you, as the authorities of the House are accountable to you for the discharge of their duties.

May I refer you to page 292 of "Erskine May", which sets out the matters on which Ministers will refuse to answer questions? They are detailed on that page and include discussions between Ministers, discussions between Ministers and advisers, proceedings in Cabinet, or the security and secret services. It is the practice of the Clerks of the House to refuse to accept for tabling questions that fall within those categories or that Ministers have refused to answer. There is no authority for that in Standing Order No. 17, but it has become the practice of the House.

May I put to you, Madam Speaker, the difficulty that the House and, to be fair to them, the Clerks now find themselves in as a result of the consistent decision of Ministers to refuse to answer questions relating to matters that are before the Scott inquiry? This is a new and unwelcome development. The Scott inquiry is not sub judice, and it is not part of the parliamentary process, as is a Select Committee. It is a departmental inquiry that will report to the President of the Board of Trade.

On previous occasions, the Table Office has accepted questions relating to matters that are before departmental inquiries, and Ministers have answered them. I have here a printout of more than 25 questions relating to the BCCI inquiry, which is precisely analogous to the Scott inquiry, in that it was a departmental inquiry chaired by Lord Justice Bingham.

What makes the decision to block questions in the Scott departmental inquiry particularly objectionable is that Lord Justice Scott has taken the welcome step of holding his hearings in public. As a result of that decision, counsel can ask questions and journalists can report questions and answers on the very subjects on which hon. Members are being debarred from asking questions. I cannot think of a distinction more likely to encourage Parliament to fall into desuetude and disrespect.

Yesterday, I sought to table a specific question of detail on which there was clear ministerial responsibility. I am mindful of the convention that it is not customary to read out questions that have been debarred, and I shall not do so, but for the guidance of the House I must say that that question did not turn on any issue of interpretation or subjectivity: it was a clear, precise question with clear, precise ministerial accountability. The Table Office yesterday refused to print that question. I suggest that that decision does a disservice to the House.

I appreciate that the House authorities cannot compel Ministers to answer questions, but nor do I think it right that they should protect Ministers from being seen to refuse questions for which there is no valid reason for not answering.

The House has a duty to scrutinise and challenge the Executive. The authorities should assist us in that role, and it would be most regrettable if the role of the authorities came to be seen as protecting Ministers from questions that are specific, urgent and within their ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central) *rose——*

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to speak to the point of order?

Mr. Cousins: No.

Madam Speaker: I shall reply to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) before I take another point of order.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, he cannot seek by way of a point of order to refer to a question that has been refused. As the House knows, "Erskine May" makes it quite clear that an hon. Member who wishes to make representations to me should do so privately and not on the Floor of the House. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will do that.

Mr. Robin Cook: Further to my point of order, Madam Speaker. I shall be most satisfied to take the matter up with you privately, but I reserve the right to make any point of order that arises when we return from the recess.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that I will not debar the hon. Gentleman from raising a point of order.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On a separate point of order, Madam Speaker. Yesterday afternoon, I received a reply to a question that I had tabled to the Secretary of State for the Environment. My question related to what plans the Government have to introduce legislation to create an environmental protection agency, to change the administrative arrangements for national parks, or to implement the provisions of the European Community habitats directive. The answer that I received was that the Government were working

"for the early creation of the Environment Agency and . . . legislation will be introduced as soon as the necessary parliamentary time can be found."

The answer clearly indicated a sense of urgency and rapid action by the Government, yet we know that for the last two weeks the Government have been briefing journalists that no legislation of any kind will appear before this House in the forthcoming parliamentary Session. Surely the Government are guilty of saying one thing in an answer to the House and another to the world outside.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must understand that I am not responsible for ministerial answers to questions. He must find other methods to pursue what is not in fact a point of order for me.

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): May I raise with you, Madam Speaker, another point that relates to the Scott inquiry. As a former member of the Trade and Industry Select Committee in the last Parliament—I have refreshed my memory of these matters by looking at videos this week—I can state that evidence given to the inquiry by Sir Hal Miller, a former Member of this House and deputy chairman of the Conservative party, while seeking to protect a member of the public, a former senior executive of the Walter Somers company, in a constituency next door to mine, unambiguously convicts that gentleman of telling an untruth to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

I emphasise that the point I raise has nothing whatever to do with the conduct of Ministers. It relates to what a witness said to the Select Committee about whether or not certain tubes for export to Iraq were or were not intended for military purposes. I realise that, when it comes to questions of privilege, I have to write to you, Madam Speaker, but I hope that you will give me an assurance that you will inform yourself of these matters. The character of an important member of the public from Dudley borough is impugned by the evidence given by Sir Hal Miller to the Scott inquiry.

Madam Speaker: Let me make it clear—I hope the House will understand this—that, as the guardian of the interests of the House and of its reputation, I take a close interest in anything that relates to those responsibilities. I do not underestimate in any way the significance of what is being said to the Scott inquiry, but the House must trust me. It must trust me, in the exercise of my discretion, to use my best judgment as to whether, or when, it would be appropriate for me to grant any applications that are made to me. These are not matters on which I should be pressed to change my mind across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You have been kind enough to respond to my letter to you, and I understand the contents of your reply. You ask me to wait until the Scott inquiry is completed, when I understand that I may write to you again on the matter. My point is that your decision in that respect should not inhibit in any way any Select Committee from taking up matters of fact or record that may come out of the Scott inquiry.

Madam Speaker: Select Committees are in charge of their own proceedings. It is not for the Speaker of this House to inhibit them. Select Committees have automony and are in charge of their own proceedings.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any application, from either the Secretary of State for Defence or the Foreign Secretary, to come to the House to make a statement about the coup in Guatemala? Before this House reassembles, British troops will be withdrawn, in some measure, plus units of the RAF, from Belize, which is on the border with Guatemala. Guatemala has now ceased to be a democracy, yet that was the basis upon which all these assumptions were being carried forward.

Madam Speaker: I have not had a request from a Minister to make such a statement, but the Ministers on the Treasury Bench have no doubt heard what the hon. Lady said.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) has just said, Madam Speaker, but mine is a different point of order.

As you know, since last night I have been trying to get one of the Fisheries Ministers to come to the Dispatch Box to make a statement about the tie-up rule, following the understandable protest by the Girvan fishermen in blockading Girvan harbour because of their frustration and anger about the tie-up rule. They were told that they could have only 80 days at sea. Some of them have already been at sea for 80 days. They are facing ruin and the collapse of their income as a result of this rule. Before the recess, surely there is some way of getting one of the Fisheries Ministers to the Dispatch Box to make an urgent statement?

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given yesterday evening by one of my deputies: I have not had any request for a Minister to make any such statement.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Madam Speaker: Mr. ——

Mr. Cryer: Cryer.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Cryer.

Mr. Cryer: I take it from your response, Madam Speaker, that this is one of only a few occasions on which I have risen to make a point of order.

Reverting to the question of White Papers and their availability, it would certainly help Back Benchers—who at present have to leave the Chamber to obtain White Papers and other documents—if Ministers were to provide them for the House. Some Ministers helpfully provide them; others do not.

I know, Madam Speaker, that you prefer Ministers to provide statements for Back Benchers rather than just Front Benchers of all parties. It might help if White Papers were actually tabled—placed on the Table of the House—so that hon. Members could collect them without having to leave the Chamber. Then there would not be any confusion about whether Members were hearing statements in the Chamber or were elsewhere.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made a useful point. It is up to the Minister whether he makes a White Paper available before his statement.

Mr. Cryer: But you would have no objection, Madam Speaker, if they were placed on the Table and we could get them from there?

Madam Speaker: I may well have a great objection to that. We have an office for the distribution of such papers. I want this Chamber kept neat and tidy.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I appeal for your support, because it is strongly suggested that, in the next day of so, the Government will announce the setting up of a committee to monitor the intelligence services—a committee composed only of Privy Councillors. If that were to be the case, would you seek to protect the House by ensuring that, if it is done during the recess, there will be an early opportunity for the House to debate it?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. We should be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) for raising this matter. As you know, it has not been possible to put down questions regarding the security services; that has been the position for many years, under successive Speakers.

There have been repeated rumours about what the Government intend to do. Many of us would strongly object to a committee on which only Privy Councillors would be allowed to sit. It would be a form of apartheid which would be opposed by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In those circumstances, Madam Speaker, would you use whatever influence you have in these matters to ensure that no statement is made until Parliament returns from the recess? Surely it would be a contempt for such a committee to be set up where we would not be able to question Ministers. It would be a continuation of what has happened over the years—our inability to table questions about the security services in any form whatsoever.

Madam Speaker: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said. I can only act on fact, not on conjecture and rumour.

BILL PRESENTED

Representation of the People

Mr. Secretary Rifkind, supported by Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Archie Hamilton and Mr. Jonathan Aitken, presented a Bill to secure that members of the regular army who, except for the purposes of training, are required to serve only in Northern Ireland are not regarded as members of the forces for the purposes of the Representation of the People Act 1983: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 202.]

Closure of Footpaths

4.38 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (High Peak): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to permit highway authorities to close footpaths during periods of severe fire risk.

It is appropriate that I should present this Bill today, because it was over the Whitsun weekend a year ago that three fires destroyed several hundred acres of moorland in my constituency. How they started will never be known; perhaps it was arson, or possibly they were caused by a discarded piece of glass or a carelessly dropped cigarette end. What we do know for certain is that the heather on the moors was tinder-dry, after weeks of very hot dry weather, and that hikers still had open access to the moors despite the danger.

We also have no illusions about the consequences of those fires. The hundreds of acres of heather that were destroyed will take at least five years, perhaps 10 years or more, to grow back. Countless animals and birds were killed as the fires raced across the moors at dozens of feet per minute. For several days, more than 70 firefighters, many of them volunteers—to whom I pay tribute—put themselves in danger to bring the fires under control, in the wretched knowledge that they could spring to life again at any moment, having smouldered for days or even weeks before bursting back into life.

Since the fires, much has been done to improve the way in which closure of the moors can be agreed. We have had to recognise that the old system did not work effectively. Its only achievement was to unite everyone in their dissatisfaction and anger at the inadequacies of the system.

Certainly, before last year's fires, those who own and work on the moors had called for closure for several days, and closure was discussed endlessly by the Peak district national park authorities. Some of its members said yes, some said no; in the end they could not agree. Even after the fires, no ready agreement could be reached on whether the moors should be closed, because there was no set formula for deciding when the risk of fire outweighed the right of access.

Since then, and over the past year, there have been considerable strides towards an automatic formula for closing moors in times of high fire risk based on the dryness of the ground—the so-called soil moisture deficit. The formula is acceptable to all parties, including the owners and the national park, as well as the sporting and rambling interests. I understand that there may soon be full agreement that, when the soil moisture deficit and the so-called stress factor of the ground reach a certain point, closure will be automatic. That is greatly to be welcomed.

Even more welcome are the steps being taken by the Peak park and the owners of the moors to set up a joint fund to ensure that helicopter support is available to fight the fires when they occur. The House will appreciate that the often remote location of fires and their intensity mean that water bombing is the only effective way to put them out.

However, all that progress will be wasted if we do not clarify the law on the closure of footpaths. An automatic procedure can be found for closing general access to the moors, which removes people's right to wander at will, but the footpaths will remain open. It is nothing short of lunacy to decide that the moors are too dry to allow people to walk over them, but then to keep open the footpaths so that tens of thousands of walkers can tramp along them, across those self-same moors, on any hot bank holiday weekend.

The Peak park attracts some 22 million visitors a year —more than any other national park in the world outside of Mount Fuji. That will be distressing news to my colleagues from Blackpool and Scarborough, who argue endlessly about the merits of their resorts, which are minor in comparison. However, there comes a time when the long-term interests of the moors and the wildlife that they support, together with the immediate short-term safety of the visitors, are such that some of those visitors need to be disappointed and refused access.

The nub of the issue is the lack of clarity in the current law. If there is a fire, footpaths—as public highways—can be closed, but there must be actual danger. If there is a risk of fire—a perceived rather than an actual danger—the law on closure becomes much more vague, absurdly increasing the risk of a fire starting.

During recent weeks, I have learnt that people in Derbyshire and Cheshire still talk with some anguish and pain about the horrendous rollicking that they once received from the Government for closing footpaths because of the fire risk. That was 17 years ago in 1976, after 81 fires had destroyed 2,500 acres of moorland. Despite that threat, the local authorities were left in no doubt that the closure of footpaths in such circumstances was simply not acceptable. It is not surprising that they have never dared to take such action again.

Since that time, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 has been introduced. It moves us forward, but still leaves us confused. It states that a footpath can be closed if there is

"a likelihood of danger to the public."

When does a risk become a likelihood? In the words of one official at the Department of the Environment:

"Fire doesn't have to be licking at the path."

Those words suggest that a fire needs to have started, rather than relying on the expert advice that there is a high and genuine risk of one starting.

Even my colleagues on the Front Bench, usually the epitome of clarity and sensible thinking, seem to be somewhat at odds on this matter. One letter that I received states that the use of footpaths

"may be restricted or even prohibited by permanent or temporary traffic regulation orders. These are used mainly to regulate vehicular traffic, but occasionally apply to footpaths and bridleways, for example to forbid horse riding or cycling at particular times, but their scope does not extend to fire risk in the surrounding area."

A further letter states:

"these powers are very flexible and can be used to deal with a whole range of circumstances, including the risk of fire."

The objective of my Bill is to remove that confusion and to make it clear that, by law, highway authorities have the power to close footpaths during times of high fire risk. It is a modest step that I hope the House will support.

A sensible further step would be to allow the national park authorities, once they had established closure procedures, to close the moors and the footpaths across them at the same time, rather than operating two separate decision-making processes. In particular, it would be sensible to allow the authorities to erect closure signs on behalf of the highway authorities.

In 1976, Derbyshire county council, which was not too familiar with the task, managed to put closure signs at

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

what they thought were the ends of footpaths, which in fact did not exist and had never existed. My colleagues will not be too surprised to learn that that council operated at that time with the customary competence and accuracy whichwe still expect of it and which makes it so beloved across the county.

While I have inevitably concentrated on the needs of my constituency, the issue is anything but local. It affects thousands of acres of national park, thousands of miles of coastal walks and popular tourist destinations across the country. It is a national issue, which is why the law should be amended.

Moreover, it is most definitely not an anti-rambler device. The moorland owners remain committed to the concept of open access, even though they run the risk of a careless minority leaving their gates open, breaking down their carefully built and maintained dry-stone walls, or cutting off their power by crashing into the overhead electricity cables in their hang gliders.

Perhaps I should declare an interest at this point as someone who has tried hang gliding. My centre of gravity made it more akin to a Flymo hovering above the ground than a bird soaring in the skies. It brought a new meaning to the idea of a Member of Parliament dropping in on his constituents.

Any closure of footpaths would be short-term—for just as long as the expert authorities considered that the risk of fire merited such closure. Fires do enormous damage to wildlife and flora, which take years to restore, if they ever can be restored. They destroy the very environment that visitors seek to enjoy. Those who own and work on the moors invest endless amounts of time and money in creating and conserving some of the most beautiful parts, not only of this country, but of our continent.

The House owes it to them and to the generations to come who want to enjoy that unique inheritance to make this small change in the law to reduce, as far as is possible, the risk of unnecessary fires and the untold damage that they bring.

4.47 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I oppose the Bill—not because I do not appreciate the fire risks, but because the Bill is misguided. With the holiday weekend almost upon us, I congratulate the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) on drawing attention to the fire risks. Anyone going into the countryside should be careful.

The Bill will do nothing to improve the current position. It deals only with footpaths, yet two of the worst fires on the top of the Pennines during the past few years occurred very close to roads. It was almost certainly the carelessness of car drivers throwing cigarettes out of their windows that caused some of those big fires, which continued to burn for many months. They were extremely difficult to extinguish, that being achieved only with the arrival of the cold and wet of winter. Therefore, it is wrong solely to pick out footpaths for legislation.

There is a need for much more public awareness of the risks, and I have already commended the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to that. There is also a need for Government action. The Peak district national park authority has submitted a set of new bylaws for control of the access land, but I understand that the Home Office is not being as speedy as it could be in dealing with them. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should extend his efforts to speeding up those bylaws rather than trying to introduce a Bill that, at this stage of the parliamentary year, has no chance of progressing.

Many people already believe that there are sufficient powers to do what the hon. Gentleman is trying to achieve through his Bill. A highway authority has power, under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended by schedule 1 of the Road Traffic (Temporary Restrictions) Act 1991, to prohibit the use of footpaths and bridleways temporarily because of the likelihood of danger to the public or serious damage to the footpath. In both those categories, if there is a fire, there is a risk to the individual crossing it and certainly danger to the footpath.

Probably my strongest reason for objecting to the Bill—certainly the reason why both the Ramblers Association and the Peak and Northern Footpaths Association object to it—is that, as a result of arguments across the Chamber about footpath measures over the years, the Rights of Way Review Committee was established in 1979. The committee has always been chaired by a Conservative Member, first by the hon. Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) and then by the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst). The chair is now held by the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning).

The committee represents the Ramblers Association, the National Farmers Union, the Country Landowners Association, the local authorities, Government Departments and the Countryside Commission, and has always been a forum for trying to achieve agreed measures. It is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman chose to ignore it and not to present it with his proposals, because there could have been a rational discussion. I am sure, if there really is a problem, that a proposal that had everybody's acceptance could have been agreed on. Insisting on unilateral legislation will not solve the problem.

I do not accept that walking creates more of a fire hazard than any other use of the land. There is no evidence that walkers have caused dangers by crossing land. In fact, there is some evidence that, on occasions, walkers have reported a small fire—not caused by them—and that that speedy action by walkers has led to getting the fire put out. Excluding people is not necessarily the way to cut down the risk. What is most important is to stress to walkers, farm workers, water board workers, gamekeepers and others the high danger of smoking while they have access to land, and the danger of leaving glass behind, as that can cause fires.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to have second thoughts about his proposals. Instead of proceeding with the Bill, which will cause controversy, he should refer the matter to the Rights of Way Review Committee for proper discussions. He should try to persuade the Home Office to speed up byelaws concerning access to land in the peak district. He has reminded us all that we must look carefully at protecting the countryside.

The last thing that anyone going out walking should want to do is cause damage. I hope that the House will leave the Bill where it stands and not give it permission to be introduced.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 44, Noes 82.

Division No. 285] **[4.52 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Beggs, Roy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomry)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gillan, Cheryl
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Hendry, Charles
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kilfedder, Sir James
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lidington, David
Maginnis, Ken
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spink, Dr [illegible]
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Sweeney, Walter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Whittingdale, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Fabricant and
Mr. David Faber.

NOES

Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A. J.
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyce, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith
Burden, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Chisholm, Malcolm
Coffey, Ann
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Garrett, John
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jowell, Tessa
Khabra, Piara S.
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Llwyd, Elfyn
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Maxton, John
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(Wy'nshawe)*
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Roche, Mrs. Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Stern, Michael
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Paul Flynn.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point of order concerns the way in which the Secretary of State for National Heritage has chosen to make a statement on the adequacy of fire protection measures for the royal palaces. It has taken several months for the report on that matter to appear. It appeared surreptitiously on the Letter Board and has been in the Press Gallery for the past five hours, yet the official Opposition have neither been notified of it nor told that there was a copy on the Letter Board.

We should have a statement on the matter, which is causing considerable concern to British taxpayers because the lack of adequate fire protection measures at Windsor castle has meant that the taxpayer is having to fork out tens of millions of pounds. We have a right to a statement in the House from the Secretary of State for National Heritage on this important matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The hon. Lady will be aware that it is not for the Chair to decide on an application for a statement, but her views will have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench.

Orders of the Day

Welsh Language Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

5.4 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It gives me great pleasure to open the debate. The Bill is an important step forward for the Welsh language. In Wales, we are proud of our culture and tradition. But underpinning our priceless heritage is the Welsh language. Twenty-six years ago, introducing the previous Welsh Language Bill, Mr. Elystan Morgan, the then Member for Cardigan, said:

"It is right and proper to regard such a priceless and irreplaceable thing as a language exactly as the greatest treasures of art which have come from the hands of the painter or the sculptor."—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1967; Vol. 750, c. 1478.]

I could not agree more with those words. Since then, the unique position of the Welsh language has been increasingly recognised.

In the past few years, there has been something of a renaissance. The census figures for 1991 show that the decline in the total number of Welsh speakers has, at last, been halted. There are now more than half a million Welsh speakers—18·7 per cent. of the population of Wales. Most importantly, statistics show that, in the all-important younger age groups—people aged between three and 15—the percentage of Welsh speakers has increased from 18 to 24 per cent. of the population over the past 10 years. I welcome those figures.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that the most important group of all is those aged 15 to 25 years? Pupils in Welsh-medium schools will correctly fill in the census form to say that they can speak Welsh, but it is what happens after such pupils have left school that makes the difference. Only when we see an increase in the number of those who can speak Welsh in the 15 to 25 age group shall we be able to say that we have turned the corner.

Mr. Hunt: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is vital to ensure that the number of Welsh speakers in the three to 15 age group continues to increase. That increase will feed through. I equally recognise that, particularly as the number of Welsh speakers is increasing—the result, I believe, of policies pioneered by many people, including my right hon. Friend the Minister of State—it is important to ensure that children leaving school have just as great an opportunity to use the Welsh language that they have learnt there.

Policies that encourage the use of the Welsh language have made substantial progress, but only because they are founded and based on consensus, which is critical. If our policies in support of the Welsh language are to succeed, they must have the support of the people in the rest of the United Kingdom, as well as those in Wales. I very much hope that there will be considerable consensus in the debate and in subsequent discussions.

Until recently, the 20th century had seen a decline in the number of Welsh speakers. It has been very much a century of decline for the Welsh language. In many ways, it is a century in which the language has had to come to terms with the enormous social and economic changes that are taking place in Wales. Those changes are still taking place, but, as I said, there are signs that the decline has been halted. The key to the resurgence in the use of the Welsh language can be found in education and, in particular, the growth in Welsh-medium education outside the traditional Welsh-speaking areas.

In 1967, there was but one Welsh-medium secondary school, containing fewer than 500 pupils, serving the whole of south Wales. Today, there are eight such schools, containing more than 5,500 pupils, and a further 63 primary schools. In Wales as a whole, Welsh-medium schools constitute more than a quarter of the total.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to pay tribute to the pioneering work of the old Labour Glamorgan county council which led the way and Mid Glamorgan which continues the tradition? If he is convinced of the value of education as a way of increasing the number of people in Wales who speak Welsh, does he agree that he should provide extra funds in places such as Bridgend which desperately need a Welsh-medium secondary school but do not have sufficient capital to build one at present?

Mr. Hunt: I pay tribute to the majority of local authorities in Wales which have pioneered many important policies. It is for a local education authority to determine its own priorities within the overall spending programme which we announce each year. However, I recognise that some local authorities have played an especially important part in the process.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Is the Secretary of State satisfied with the fact that there is no dedicated Welsh-medium secondary school in Powys? Will he explain why the Bill does not enshrine the right for parents to have their children educated through the medium of Welsh? Surely a Welsh Language Bill, which appears so rarely, should enshrine that right for the people in Wales who wish to take advantage of it.

Mr. Hunt: It has traditionally been left to local education authorities to determine their priorities in that respect. Of course, the hon. and learned Gentleman should make Powys county council aware of the views that he has expressed so strongly, but, at the end of the day, it is for Powys county council to determine the provision of education under existing policies. The vast majority of education authorities in Wales have shown a positive attitude to expanding Welsh-medium education. The Government have introduced a larger element of parental choice in education.

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): Gwent has not traditionally taught Welsh as a compulsory subject. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a great need for extra resources to train teachers already employed in Gwent, and to employ more teachers, to teach Welsh? Does he accept that there is a major disagreement between his Department and Gwent about proper resourcing for the teaching of the Welsh language?

Mr. Hunt: We have provided additional resources to increase the number of teachers available for the teaching of Welsh, but it is for local authorities to determine their spending priorities in this and other spheres.

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): My right hon. Friend should be aware that there is widespread concern in Powys about the provision of Welsh-medium education, but the observations made in another place, which I understand are part of Government policy, have provided assurances that the schemes that are to be put to the new Welsh Language Board created under the Bill will include the requirement for local authorities to examine the provision of Welsh-medium education.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I shall refer to it when I deal with the powers of the Welsh Language Board. As my hon. Friend rightly says, the Bill establishes a Welsh Language Board as a statutory body. Education and schemes for the provision of education will be included in its overall jurisdiction.

I was talking about Welsh-medium schools. The Welsh nursery schools movement, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, did not exist in 1967. Today, it sponsors some 1,000 Welsh-medium nursery schools in Wales and is part of a thriving Welsh language voluntary sector. That reflects, in part, the growth in Government support, but the sheer commitment of the people involved has been the main motivation and driving force.

Welsh language television broadcasting was in its infancy in 1967. It was a relatively new adventure in which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State was one of the heroes. He was heavily involved. Today, S4C broadcasts in Welsh during peak hours and is a model for broadcasting in a minority language. I pay tribute to all those involved.

The Welsh Language Act 1967 was an important step. It confirmed the position of spoken Welsh in the courts and led to a significant expansion in its use in public administration. However, it was legislation for its time. Times have now changed; hence, the need for the Bill.

The most important change that has taken place is the fact that the language is now surrounded by what is best described as an aura of confidence. It is increasingly used in all aspects of people's lives, and that is in no small measure due to the consistent support of Governments in the past two decades. I am especially pleased that the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) is to wind up for the Opposition. I recall the steps that he took to give financial assistance to the National Eisteddfod. He was responsible for introducing the powers to fund bilingual education projects which the in-coming Conservative Government accepted and were happy to enact in the Education Act 1980. I pay tribute to him for what, in historical terms, is seen as an important step.

I remember the major policy speech made at Llanrwst by my noble Friend Lord Crickhowell. No doubt the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) also remembers it well. The language's status has been reinforced in various Acts. An especially historic step was that taken by my immediate predecessor, now Lord Walker. He made Welsh a foundation subject in the national curriculum and a core subject in Welsh-medium schools.

The future of the language will, of course, depend on far more than Government action alone.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The right hon. Gentleman has made great play of Government initiatives and the Government's willingness to respond to representations, but will he pay tribute to those who have for decades exerted considerable pressure on Governments, national and local, by way of vigorous campaigning and at no small cost? It is fair to say that we would not have got even as far as we have today but for their enormous commitment to the Welsh language and their willingness to act.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated what I was about to say. As he rose, I was saying that the future of the language will depend on far more than Government action alone. Many people have been prepared, within the law, to demonstrate their strong support for the Welsh language. At times, it has been difficult to maintain that posture against some of the extremists, but I pay great tribute to the dedicated people who, within the law, have helped us to ensure that one of Europe's oldest languages survives as a living language. However, the Government have a role to play. The reports submitted to me by the Welsh Language Board argue cogently about what role legislation could play, and the Bill represents the Government's response to the board's recommendations.

Wales is a bilingual society. The opportunities for people to choose which language they wish to use should therefore be as wide as possible. I want to see a level playing field for English and Welsh, and the Bill recognises that, because Welsh speakers are a minority of the total population of Wales, the language requires some assistance if that choice is to be exercised as widely as possible. Much has already been done to facilitate the use of the language, and the Bill seeks to build on that.

The Welsh language is already widely used for official purposes; it is the language of public administration in many parts of Wales, but the Bill is founded on a recognition that sometimes there can be obstacles to the use of Welsh. Some of the obstacles can be removed by statute, and the Bill tackles those directly. Others are susceptible to removal by administrative means, and the Bill establishes a framework that allows the practical obstacles to be tackled by the preparation of Welsh language schemes.

Before referring to the challenge that faces the new statutory Welsh Language Board, I shall mention the work of the current board under its existing chairman John Elfed Jones. I believe that the consensus about the sort of general principles that should govern policy on the language—principles now reflected in the Bill—is largely a result of the sensitive, reasonable, but always tenacious way in which the board has conducted itself over the past five years. On Second Reading, it is appropriate for me to pay my personal tribute to John Elfed Jones for his leadership and his enthusiasm for our language, and to the members of the board and its officers for the dedication that they have shown to the furtherance of the Welsh language.

It is fitting, therefore, that clause 1 establishes the statutory Welsh Language Board. The work of the current board has shown the advantages to be gained from having a body able to promote and facilitate the language whenever it is used.

Clause 2 concerns the board's membership. It was amended during the Bill's consideration in the House of Lords to underline the breadth of expertise that the membership will need to reflect if the board is effectively to carry out its extremely wide remit.

[Mr. Hunt]

Clause 3 defines that remit as promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language, as well as advising the Secretary of State for Wales on all aspects of its use.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): Will the Secretary of State ensure that appointments to the board will be made only from people on the list kept in the Welsh Office, that the forms will have to be correctly filled in in good time, and that no one will be appointed who has not been on that list for at least a year?

Mr. Hunt: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to place an obstacle in the way of promoting and appointing the best people. I am never attracted by the bureaucratic response that says to someone of considerable ability, "Sorry, you cannot be appointed because you have not been on the list for a year." I shall genuinely reflect on the importance on the hon. Gentleman's arguments, but without undertaking to be bound by them.

The board's promotional powers are potentially wide ranging, and they include the power to pay grants in support of the Welsh language. Our intention is that the board should assume responsibility for grant aiding all but the major Welsh language organisations as soon as possible.

Mr. Alex Carlile: May I return for a moment to the Secretary of State's justified tribute to the board? Many of us agree that the board has done an excellent job, so will the right hon. Gentleman explain during his speech why he is not presenting to the House the Bill drafted by the board?

Mr. Hunt: We have discussed with the board at all stages the Bill that should be presented. I believe that it is generally accepted that the board's draft could not be immediately translated into the proposed legislation. No doubt in Committee, as we go through the Bill clause by clause, hon. Members from all parties will propose amendments to reflect the issues that they believe that the Bill does not contain. However, I believe that, subject to some amendments that the Government will introduce, the Bill largely reflects the way forward for the Welsh language.

The Bill does not define——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: Just a moment. I shall finish what I was saying about clause 3.

The Bill does not define the promotional function in great detail, because it will be for the board to decide how the functions should be exercised. The board should establish itself as an acknowledged centre of excellence and expertise on all matters to do with the language, and I believe that it must do so independent of day-to-day interference of the Government, whichever Government may be in power.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: The Secretary of State will acknowledge that the Bill should set out a framework within which the language can flourish, and that the board considered that the framework needed a statement of principle. The statement of principle that the board believed should be enhrined in the Bill was that of equal status for the language. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he and his colleagues in government would be prepared to consider any form of amendment that would include such a statement on the face of the Bill?

Mr. Hunt: I believe that the phrase put to me at the time was "equal validity" rather than "equal status". Whichever phrase is used, I am advised that the most appropriate way forward is to say that a basis of equality between Welsh and English is needed. No doubt we can examine such matters in Committee.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The actual wording in the Bill is "official language". I believe that that means status. *[Interruption.]* That is the board's wording.

Mr. Hunt: I believe that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the board's draft Bill.

Mr. Llwyd: Yes.

Mr. Hunt: I realise that those are important issues which will have to be tackled in Committee, as we seek to ensure that the words that become part of an Act of Parliament are correct. As a lawyer, the hon. Gentleman will understand that it was subsequently discovered that the words used in the original Welsh Language Act 1967 had a different effect from that which the Ministers who introduced the Bill expected. One of the reasons why the present Bill is required is to amend the original Act. I do not want to leave to my successors—*[Interruption]*—in many years' time—*[Interruption]*—the need to pass amending legislation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Time to go."] I had felt there was a tendency to somnolence on the Opposition Benches, and I am pleased to have woken up some hon. Members.

I want the Bill to establish as flexible as possible a framework. For example, I believe that most people would accept that the Government's policy of an arm's-length involvement with the creative arts, as embodied in the relationship between the Arts Council and the Government, is now well established. The creation of the Welsh Language Board provides us with an opportunity to establish a similar principle for the Welsh language. As with the arts, there will always be some matters—such as the total public resources made available, and the broad strategic priorities—on which the Government will have to take a view. However, other matters will be best left to the board.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Before the Secretary of State leaves, will he advise us? The issue of equal status and equal validity was debated at some length on a series of amendments in another place. Are we to take it from what the right hon. Gentleman is saying now that he is sympathetic and open-minded towards the idea of accepting amendments that were rejected in another place?

Mr. Hunt: I understand that the hon. Gentleman was talking about my leaving that specific point in my speech. We espouse the principle of equal status and equal validity, but we seek to translate that in the most effective way that we are told is necessary in the Bill that we are presenting to the House. If the hon. Gentleman has a formula which we are told is more effective, we shall listen with some degree of surprise to him, but with some interest as well.

It may be helpful to the House if I explain the Government's view of the broad strategic priorities that the board will need to address. I hope that there will be substantial agreement about them. The first is preparing and consulting on the guidelines on the form and content of Welsh language schemes. The introduction of schemes for the major public sector bodies in Wales, including Government Departments, should also be a priority. We will expect the board to continue its work in an advisory capacity in the private sector in which its voluntary guidelines have achieved much already. It will also be important for the board to further the language through innovative and imaginative schemes, as it has with Menter Cwm Gwendraeth and its existing Welsh language software projects. Education will be another area in which the board will need to develop expertise and guidance in the way anticipated by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) earlier.

I will expect the board to respond to the strategic priorities at the earliest possible opportunity after it is established. I expect there to be considerable interest in the early statement that will be published by the board setting out its policies and priorities. I hope that that will be a public document on which there can be widespread consultation.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): In that context, and with regard to the need to develop a comprehensive strategy—much of it impinges on legislation, but some parts of it go beyond language legislation into planning, housing and employment—is the right hon. Gentleman aware that "Strategaeth Iaith", which has been published by Fforwm Iaith Genedlaethol, laid down guidelines for such a strategy? Can he ensure that those elements are taken on board by the Welsh Office when it drafts new strategic guidelines with the new board?

Mr. Hunt: The issues, some of which have been mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, will need to be addressed and taken on board as we proceed in the way in which I have outlined.

I hope that it will become immediately apparent to the House that the Welsh Language Board will be right at the heart of the changes that the Bill is intended to bring about. The fact that the Bill does not spell out in every last detail the way in which Parliament expects the board to go about its task only serves to emphasise the responsibiity that the House will place on the chairman of the board and its members. Therefore, the chairman will need to be a person of many talents, not the least of which is the ability to follow in the footsteps of so able a predecessor as John Elfed Jones.

I am pleased to be able to announce to the House that the Prime Minister has agreed that Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas will be the first chairman of the statutory board. *[Interruption.]* I am pleased at that response, and hope that the *Official Report* will show that approval for that announcement came from both sides of the House. Lord Elis-Thomas has accepted the offer of appointment and will assume the role formally if Parliament agrees to the passage of the Bill two months after Royal Assent. As chairman-elect, he will be involved closely in the detailed preparatory work that will be required.

Lord Elis-Thomas is known to all the people in Wales as a life-long supporter of the Welsh language. Having heard his outstanding maiden speech in another place, I know that he combines that support with a deep understanding of the issues affecting the future well-being of the language. I hope that the House will agree that we have secured the services of a dynamic and exciting chairman for the board and will join me in wishing Lord Elis-Thomas every possible success in this most important task.

Mr. Morgan: We wish every success to the new chairman of the Welsh Language Board—as we would wish success to anyone who had been elected to that difficult appointment with such an enormous task in front of him; one could hardly not wish such success to anyone who is appointed. However, from the maiden speech and other speeches made in another place by Lord Elis-Thomas, we have noticed that he has traversed a great political difference since leaving this House. Can the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that the appointment is not part of any written agreement with Plaid Cymru relating to the Maastricht treaty votes of which we have heard, though we have never seen the text?

Mr. Hunt: The House should be used to the nonsense that comes, sadly, from the Labour Front Bench in the form of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). I hope that he will welcome my announcement today of the reappointment of Lord Brookes as deputy chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation and recognise that as another demonstration that we always appoint the best people to the tasks that lie ahead.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunt: I shall give way in a moment.

Recently, there has been a growing awareness of the role of public bodies in ensuring that Welsh speakers are able to use Welsh to obtain the public services that are such a major part of people's everyday lives. That is a crucial development because, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, West said in an earlier intervention, over the next few years there will be a growing number of young people leaving school who have had the opportunity to study Welsh throughout their school careers. The impact of Welsh in the national curriculum will be that much more powerful as Welsh is seen more as a prominent feature of the world in which our children grow up.

The Bill aims to secure a general improvement in the level of Welsh language service that is provided across the public sector in Wales by requiring public bodies to prepare Welsh language schemes. Clauses 5 to 21 establish the legal framework governing the duty to prepare schemes and their subsequent operation. The board will be at the heart of that framework because it will influence the rate at which schemes will be introduced. It will have the task of approving schemes as well as any subsequent revisions to them and investigate complaints arising from their operation.

The principle of equality, which is set out in clause 5, lies at the heart of the Bill and will be a powerful and flexible framework for the board to have at its disposal. Welsh has been the language of large areas of public administration over a long period. Its use in public business has expanded significantly over the past two decades. Establishing the principle of equality by means of

[Mr. Hunt]

this legislation will, however, serve to remove any uncertainty that may have surrounded the use of Welsh for official purposes.

The crucial feature of the Bill is that, at the same time as it establishes the principle of equality, it puts that principle into practice by requiring that the purpose of schemes should be to give effect to the principle that the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality. The only qualification to that is that it must be appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable. Let me make it plain that it will not be open to public bodies to take a narrow view of what is appropriate and reasonably practicable. The test will need to be applied objectively in every case, the content of each organisation's scheme will need to be approved by the Welsh Language Board and every scheme must comply with the board's statutory guidelines.

Welsh language schemes will be introduced for every public body serving Wales, including bodies based outside Wales but which provide a service that extends to Wales. However, the terms of clause 6 enable me, by order, to specify further bodies as public bodies for the purposes of the Bill. More generally, the Bill draws an important distinction between public and private sector organisations. The board will have the power to advise private bodies on their use of the language.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: When Committees of the House that relate to Wales, such as the Welsh Grand Committee and the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, meet in Wales, will they be required to have facilities to allow the Welsh language to be used?

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman is the Chairman of one of the most prestigious Select Committees. He will know that it is a matter for the House, not for me as a member of the Government, to lay down a particular policy. The matter ought to, and will, be decided within the House.

Government Departments have been at the forefront of many of the most innovative and successful Welsh language policies introduced in recent years. Therefore, I am pleased to confirm today that all Government Departments and agencies will introduce such schemes. Although the Bill necessarily will have rather different provisions for Crown bodies, I assure the House that the schemes of such bodies will be subject to the same scrutiny by the Welsh Language Board as all other schemes. Just as with other public bodies, the board will be able to investigate complaints arising from the schemes of Crown bodies—although I hope that there will not be any complaints—and publish its findings.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): An evolution is taking place from the public to the private sector. When a body such as the Post Office moves from one regime to another and becomes a private limited company, will it carry with it the obligations that it had as a public body?

Mr. Hunt: I hope that the Post Office will recognise the spirit of what I have said.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Answer.

Mr. Hunt: The answer is that we have drawn a distinction in the Bill between public and private bodies.

Mr. Alex Carlile: So the answer is no.

Mr. Hunt: It is difficult to deal with sedentary interventions, especially when they may not be reflected in the record. To make it clear, the Bill introduces a distinction between public and private bodies. Those bodies that are at present public are well known, as are the bodies that are private.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hunt: As I have dealt with the sedentary intervention, I shall now deal with a proper one.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Secretary of State accept that clause 6(1)(o) says:

"any person (whether or not a body corporate or unincorporate) who appears to the Secretary of State to be exercising functions of a public nature . . . by order made by the Secretary of State for the purposes of this Part of the Act"

can be brought into those provisions? If the Secretary of State is so minded and the board is so minded, the provisions that apply to the Post Office in the public sector could be made to apply to the Post Office in the private sector.

Mr. Hunt: I do not wish to mislead the hon. Gentleman. If he reflects, he will realise that it is not possible for a body in those circumstances to make the transition from the public to the private sector and still be caught by the provisions of clause 6(1)(o) as he has described them. However, those are matters for Committee and we shall no doubt deliberate them.

Mr. Donald Anderson: But it is a fundamental point.

Mr. Hunt: Yes, it is a fundamental point. I have answered it by making it clear to the House that we do not believe that the provisions of the Bill, as they apply to public bodies, should be applied in equal measure to private sector bodies and organisations. I have one qualification. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) was right to refer to the power provided in the Bill to ensure that the private sector training and enterprise councils can be brought within the terms of the legislation.

The aim of the Bill is to bring about a general improvement in the level of Welsh language services. If the Bill is to succeed, it will need to respond to the particular needs of the Welsh speakers who use those services. Therefore, there must be consultation on schemes. Schemes will need to be flexible. As my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) has said to me on several occasions, it would not be sensible to impose the same scheme uniformly on every public body in Wales. I suspect that for the foreseeable future the provision of Welsh language services will be more prominent in Pwllheli than in Pontypridd. The Bill reflects that.

It will also be important that there is a common understanding of the general principles that constitute an effective Welsh language service and of how practical effect can be given to the principle of equality. Therefore, all public bodies will have to have regard to guidelines prepared by the board in drawing up their schemes.

Mr. Hain: If Group 4 undertakes any agency work for the Government or any of their services, will it be expected to conform to the terms of the Bill? If Group 4's record in the prison service is anything to go by, surely that will give new meaning to freedom for Welsh speakers.

Mr. Hunt: I do not think that I should respond to that sort of intervention in a serious debate.

Education will feature prominently among the board's responsibilities. Welsh-medium education will be included in the Welsh language schemes prepared by local authorities. A similar duty will extend to the schools funding council for Wales, which I may establish under the provisions of the Education Bill currently being considered in another place.

One of the issues that the Bill will not affect is the position of Welsh in the national curriculum and the content of the curriculum taught through the medium of Welsh. Those matters are already secured in separate legislation. Welsh is established as a foundation subject within the national curriculum and it is a core subject in Welsh medium schools. Schemes will not be able to alter that in any way.

The advisory role of the Welsh Language Board will also extend to education. The board will assume the responsibility currently exercised by the Welsh Language Education Department Committee to take a broad overview of the Welsh language in all phases of education.

If Welsh is to enjoy the status in the conduct of public business that we intend, the Bill needs to address not just the practical but the legislative obstacles that stand in the way of Welsh and English being dealt with on a basis of equality. Practical obstacles will be addressed by the schemes. Legal obstacles are dealt with in part III of the Bill.

Clauses 22 to 24 re-enact the provisions in the Welsh Language Act 1967 on the use of Welsh in courts. I restate that we are committed to clarifying the position of written evidence in Welsh. That complex area is one on which I hope we shall be able to make progress in Committee.

Clauses 25 to 29 extend the existing powers that enable the holder of the office of Secretary of State to prescribe Welsh versions of forms. I and my colleagues will in future be able to prescribe Welsh versions of forms of words and names of bodies and places currently prescribed in statute in English only.

Perhaps one of the most important provisions is part III, which repeals the spent provisions of the Laws in Wales Acts of 1535 and 1542. The Laws in Wales Acts, commonly referred to as the Act of Union, have not stood in the way of the continued survival of the Welsh language or of its more recent renaissance. Their presence on the statute book has, however, cast a shadow over the status which the language enjoys and which will be consolidated and enhanced by the Bill.

Mr. Dafis: I wish to return briefly to the subject of the board's functions. The Secretary of State has described a board that will have a broad remit, and will be in a position to make decisions of far-reaching import, particularly in relation to Welsh-medium education and the development of a strategy for the revival of the Welsh language. Some of us feel unhappy that that function should be given to an unelected body.

Does the Secretary of State recognise that a board of this nature needs to have considerably more resources at its disposal than the £600,000 per annum mentioned in the preamble to the Bill? It is an enormously ambitious project and the board will need resources commensurate with that.

Mr. Hunt: I am sad that the hon. Gentleman did not pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has increased the level of grant to assist the Welsh language. That grant is now exceeding £7 million, and that money is additional to the amount spent through the revenue support grant to promote the Welsh language. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that we are offering record levels of support for the Welsh language. I make no apology for that, because the Welsh language is a unique feature of our cultural heritage.

We are determined to ensure that the Welsh language should continue to be supported by policies that promote its use in all aspects of life in Wales. The Bill represents an important consolidation and significant strengthening of that policy.

Our intention is that the legislation should catch the spirit of the times. The Bill recognises the enormous reservoir of good will towards the Welsh language and seeks to build on it. It recognises the simple but crucial point that the more widespread the use of the Welsh language, the more its future will be safeguarded. The Bill will build on existing policies and successes. It will establish a flexible and lasting legal framework within which the language can prosper and flourish for many generations to come.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Did you receive prior notification that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) had been replaced by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) as the shadow spokesman on Welsh affairs?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I do not think that that is a matter for the Chair.

5.51 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Mae'n anrhydedd fawr i ddilyn o'r ochr hyn ar y mesur hyn.

I should like to continue in Welsh, but that is not allowed under the rules of the House. I thought that it was appropriate to begin my speech in Welsh, however, as it is 26 years since the House debated the Welsh Language Act 1967. For the benefit of those who do not understand Welsh, I began by saying that it is a great honour to be asked to lead for the Opposition on the Bill. I feel that the word "anrhydedd" has a little more flavour than its English equivalent: honour.

The Opposition welcome the opportunity to debate the Bill. We shall not vote against it, despite its imperfections and the inflexibility shown by the Government during its passage from the other place to its Second Reading in this House. We fear, however, that if the Bill is not amended and the Government do not listen more and act on what they are told by the people of Wales, the sore will still fester. People will not be satisfied that the Government or the House have made the most of this unique opportunity.

We shall not legislate on this subject again this side of the millennium. We therefore feel that the Government must be sensitive to the demands from all corners of Wales and all those organisations which have taken an interest in the Bill and those on whom the duties contained in the Bill will fall. It is important to get things right before the Bill is set in concrete and another 26 years pass before the House considers the subject again. Indeed, I should like to think that it will be 56 years before we debate it again.

[Mr. Rhodri Morgan]

So far, the Government's performance has not been up to scratch and they have not shown sufficient sensitivity to people's requests. We discovered part of the reason for that earlier, when the Secretary of State let the cat out of the bag by displaying his keenness for a place in the sun in the Cabinet, in another job, if the reshuffle occurs. We must tell the right hon. Gentleman that it is the Prime Minister who makes any reshuffle—the right hon. Gentleman cannot reshuffle himself. Perhaps he was sending the same sort of message to the Prime Minister as that sent by Lord Elis-Thomas in another place about a job that would need to be filled and certain candidates who were pretty keen to fill it. There are certain means of sending such messages—people must read between the lines. I am sure that the Chief Whip and the Prime Minister will do the same with the remarks of the Secretary of State.

The debate centres on how to restore the status of the Welsh language and repair the damage that was done to it. Without turning the clock back, we must attempt to repair the damage that was done to the language in the past millennium—perhaps that is a slight exaggeration—or certainly in the past 100 years or so, since universal primary education was introduced in Wales in the 1870s. The spent statutes to which the Secretary of State referred also inflicted earlier damage on the language.

We must achieve a better understanding about what will revitalise the Welsh language. The Secretary of State said that the Welsh language is now surrounded by an aura of confidence. It almost sounded as if he was making a toothpaste advertisement. I fear that what the right hon. Gentleman really meant was that the Welsh language was surrounded by several blankets of Welsh flannel. He was being far to complacent when he said that the 1991 census suggested that the use of the Welsh language had turned the corner. We are not convinced. As I said earlier, we need to provide jobs for young Welsh people who attend Welsh-medium schools so that they can develop the use of that language, rather than lose everything that they were taught.

Young people may be taught Welsh in an English school in a Welsh-speaking part of Wales or in a Welsh-medium school in an English-speaking part of Wales—for example, the south-east, where there has been a tremendous growth in Welsh-medium education. South Glamorgan and Mid Glamorgan have led the way in the provision of Welsh-medium education. The provision in Gwent is slightly poorer, while that in West Glamorgan is worse still. No doubt the Welsh Language Board will want to consider how to encourage some of the laggard counties to develop that provision. It is extremely important to discover why a county such as West Glamorgan, which is still home to a great number of native Welsh speakers, is more laggardly in its provision of Welsh language teaching than South Glamorgan or Mid Glamorgan, where the Welsh language has been almost lost as a means of local, authentic speech. Is it a general principle of human life that we value something only when we have almost lost it? I do not know, but we must try to ensure that those laggardly counties match the best practice of others.

The Secretary of State is far too complacent when he suggests that the use of the Welsh language has turned the corner. I do not believe that he realises just what a difficult job the Welsh language has to do in competing with English. The survival of the Welsh language is remarkable. Even today there are more people speaking Welsh than there were in 1801. In fact, there are more people speaking Welsh now than the entire Welsh population in 1801, which was no more than 500,000. In the 19th century, the Welsh-speaking population doubled to 1 million, but it has now halved again, which is extremely sad.

The demise of the Welsh language is related to the strains imposed by the de-industrialisation of the 1930s and the 1980s. If there are no jobs, it is difficult to keep people in Wales. Most people speak Welsh provided that they do not migrate. If a person migrates to England, or even to another part of Wales, it is extremely unlikely that he will continue to speak Welsh. The supply of jobs and the economic development of Wales is an extremely important issue, but the Secretary of State did not devote sufficient time to it.

The Opposition are keen to ensure that Welsh speakers should have jobs, because that means that the Welsh language is likely to survive. If the Welsh economy goes downhill, so will the use of the Welsh language.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Surely jobs are required for people in Wales whether or not they speak Welsh. If the hon. Gentleman is advocating that specific arrangements should be made for Welsh speakers, I should remind him that pupils of Welsh-medium schools achieve far better examination results than those who attend English-speaking schools. If we are to direct our efforts towards a specific goal, we should direct them towards raising the standards in English schools.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman has totally misunderstood my point. The anthracite coal field was the prime source of employment in one of the strongest areas of Welsh-speaking Wales—from Maesteg, through the Neath, Swansea and Gwendraeth valleys down to Kidwelly. There is now virtually no anthracite coal mining. Almost the whole of the anthracite coal field in Wales was Welsh speaking. Now that there are no more pits, how can we ensure that the Welsh-speaking population of the anthracite coal field has a good reason to stay there and to speak Welsh? They have to be found alternative jobs.

Original industrialisation led to the Welsh language surviving and the number of Welsh speakers doubled in the 19th century, but that industrial base largely disappeared in the 1930s and was in crisis in the 1980s. The underlying strength of the economy is vital to the continuation of Welsh speaking.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I shall use a historical analogy to bring out the strength of my hon. Friend's argument. One reason why Welsh survived as one of the Celtic languages was the huge provision of jobs in Wales, compared with Ireland, as a result of the industrial revolution. That shows why a strong economy is vital to the survival of the Welsh language.

Mr. Morgan: The argument advanced by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) illustrates the fears expressed by all Labour Members. There cannot be a future for the Welsh language if it is simply to become the first language in the history of the universe to be spoken exclusively by university graduates. If we do not understand the importance of the disappearance of the coal mines, the tin plate works and the slate quarries of

north Wales, and if we do not replace the jobs that originally sustained the Welsh economy, it will be difficult to see a bright future for the Welsh language. That will be true no matter what efforts are made to provide jobs for university graduates or students with O-levels who leave Welsh-language or Welsh-medium schools in English speaking areas of Wales such as the south-east and the north-east corners. That is the problem that the legislation has done little to solve, and the Secretary of State has not touched on it in his speech.

The Secretary of State must understand how strongly the English language continues to penetrate life. The English language is a wonderfully flexible instrument of communication in technology, engineering and science. If we underestimate the strength and flexibility of the English language, we shall not make proper provision for the survival of the Welsh language. The English language is the only language that is half Germanic and half Latin, which means that there are more than 1 billion people in the world for whom English is either their first language or an easy second language to learn.

Some 300 million people in Europe speak English or another Germanic tongue which is a cousin of the easy, small words of the English language, and a further 300 million people speak a Latin-based language involving the longer words. In North America and South America, 300 million speak a Latin-based language. That makes a total of 1·2 billion people who speak English, compared with the 500,000 people who speak Welsh. That shows the extent of the problem and the measure of our task today.

I am not saying that our task is hopeless, but it is difficult, and we must understand the measure of it or we shall end up believing, as many English people and English-speaking Americans do, that there is only space for one language in the world—English—and the sooner everybody speaks it, the better. I recall the words of a Texas senator when the question first arose as to whether Spanish should be taught in the primary schools of San Antonio, near the Mexican border. He said that if the English language was good enough for Jesus Christ it should be good enough for the Texas school board. English people sometimes have an Anglocentric world view. We have to explain that, while not wanting to live in a ghetto or on a reservation, or to penalise people who do not speak Welsh and are unlikely to learn it, we intend to ensure that the Welsh language continues to fight for its survival, even against a powerful competitor, in the minds of the people in Wales.

The Bill is based on the board; it is based on whether Parliament can successfully delegate its functions to a board which is run under the chairmanship of someone whose identity we now know. The electricity industry now places enormous power in the hands of the regulator, OFFER; the gas industry places power in the hands of Ofgas; and there is also Oftel. In the same way, we are to have a sort of regulator for the Welsh language—it could be called Offiaith—which will be given enormous powers. It will be based on a fundamental theory of British government with which we do not agree: the good chap theory of government.

The theory is that if the right chaps are appointed, the job can be left to them, Parliament need not worry about the issue, which can be put to sleep so that it need not return to the House. One is then faced with the problem of who should appoint the good chaps. Who are they, and are they representative of the people of Wales? Will we be satisfied with setting up another quango and saying, "Goodbye quango—we have set you up, we are paying your wages, now do the job that we have instructed you to do, come back and see the Public Accounts Committee every three years and the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs every year." Will we then be content to think that Parliament has done its job by sub-contracting a quango?

Lord Rothschild said that the good chap theory of government in England was based on picking people who were 53, white, male, residents of the south-east of England and members of the Reform club. As I was 53 myself a few months ago I have started to warm to the theory of how to run British government, although I do not think that I am a candidate. If applied in Wales, the theory would be based on picking people who were white, male, resident in the south-east of Wales, owning a farm in the Vale of Usk, being frequent dinner guests of Lord and Lady Crickhowell and possibly supporters of the Welsh National Opera. Those attributes would probably qualify someone to be on the good chaps quango.

Approval of such an approach depends on whether the board is seen to be representative and sensitive to the needs of Wales and accountable to Parliament, the people of Wales or other democratically elected organisations in Wales such as the local authorities. It depends on whether it is seen to have good contacts with people in non-Welsh-speaking areas as well as Welsh-speaking areas of Wales. If the board is set up as a normal Welsh Office quango, it will be heading for disaster. If the Secretary of State can tell us a bit more about how he intends to ensure that the board will not be a conventional Government quango, we may be able to accept the policy of sub-contracting a board to do the job.

Such a quango would not have to be based on conventional quangos. It is possible to set up quangos that are partly democratically accountable. The Welsh Joint Education Committee was a sort of quango, but it consisted largely of local authority representatives who were accountable to democratically elected councillors whose backsides could be kicked by the people every three or four years, and who could be removed if they were not doing the job that the people wanted them to do.

Appointments could be made to the quango so that at least the chairman, and possibly other members, had to appear before the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs before their appointments were confirmed. That is the process in the United States, where there are confirmatory hearings in the Senate. The Select Committee could ask potential members how they intended to pursue policies, what sort of relationship they intended to have with the Secretary of State and how independent they intended to be.

It is not good enough for the Secretary of State merely to come to the House and say that the best people will always be appointed, and expect us to take his word for it. He must accept that, while a Government of his political colour are in office, it will not automatically be seen by the majority of people in Wales—who do not vote for the Conservative party—that the people he appoints will necessarily be very representative of the people of Wales.

On an issue such as the Welsh language it is critically important that the Government find some means of moving away from the convention of Welsh Office quangos. One might wonder whether the board will be representative, but another crucial matter is the degree of control that it will have with regard to the resources

[Mr. Morgan]

provided for Welsh-medium education. In another place, there were interminable debates on this issue, but the Government provided no satisfaction. It was said simply that everything would be based on boards and that the education authorities would have to prepare schemes, just as the health authorities do. But the schemes of most public bodies in Wales involve very little by way of resources; they concern themselves with such matters as the provision of Welsh speakers on staffs for the purpose of answering queries in Welsh and translating forms. Education is totally different. Here, the expenditure could run into millions of pounds. In an average county, it would take perhaps £500,000 annually to build one new primary school every year and, perhaps, a new secondary school every 10 years. There is a quantum leap between the two situations.

We shall want to know what powers the board will have to approve schemes with the resource implications of Welsh-medium education bids by county councils or by schools themselves. These resource implications are totally different from those of other schemes; yet the Secretary of State slid over this area in an unsatisfactory way.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend is dealing with a fundamental and very important point. The successful development of Welsh-medium education in areas such as mine has been based on a very sensitive balance of resources between English-language nursery schools and Welsh-language nursery schools. We have avoided conflict and tension. Any Welsh language board must not blunder into the situation without appreciating local democratic decisions and sensitivities.

Mr. Morgan: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. There must be local democratic accountability for such education decisions. In a budget year, there could be a conflict between a Welsh-language school and a special-needs school. If democratic accountability is removed, things are made very difficult. But how is democratic accountability to be secured at an all-Wales board level? I do not want to divert the debate into areas relating to a Welsh assembly, but the establishment of such an assembly would be one means of securing democratic accountability. Local authorities could be used to the greatest possible extent by being given the right to nominate board members. In any case, we must not leave everything to people throwing themselves against the walls of a quango that is responsible only to the person who appointed it—the Secretary of State. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that such a system will satisfy people, he is making a big mistake.

We want to ensure that the Bill leaves this House in an improved state. We do not intend to vote against it, but we see many imperfections in it. It is important that it should achieve the maximum measure of good will. We do not want people in strongly Welsh-speaking areas to say that it has not done enough, or people in Newport, Presteigne, Knighton, Connah's Quay or Milford Haven to say that it has done far too much by introducing what they regard as some sort of discriminatory provision in favour of Welsh speakers in relation to employment. It is extremely unlikely that the good will that we want to see would be achieved in those circumstances. We want people in Newport to be able, when the Bill becomes law, to say, "It's a good thing that this law is now on the statute book: we may not speak Welsh ourselves, but people in other parts of the country do, so we want to give the Act a fair wind and wish it godspeed." Thus the attitudes adopted by all the parties in the House are extremely important. The Secretary of State must appreciate how important it is that he should demonstrate give and take such as we have not seen so far.

In connection with the privatised utilities, the Secretary of State used words that I found difficult to understand. I was able to make something of them only by reference to the report of the debates in another place. With the possible exception of the training and enterprise councils —perhaps not a very good example—it appears that privatised utilities will not be touched by the Bill.

Mr. Donald Anderson: We have here a new dimension. The Government's declared policy is substantially to reduce the public sector by a whole series of measures, including full-scale privatisation and market testing across the board. There is a danger that a large number of bodies within the scope of the Bill will be removed as a result of Government policy.

Mr. Morgan: I am extremely glad that my hon. Friend has raised that point. Opposition Members have to judge the Bill's effectiveness not only on the basis of what the Secretary of State has said today but also on the basis of what the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said recently. The Chief Secretary has made the point that he wants to roll back the frontiers of the state much further. Thus there is no point in the Secretary of State's coming here and saying, somewhat boastfully, that the good news is that the Government are legislating to bring the Welsh language up to a level of equality in the public sector while the bad news is that there will not be any public sector. What will be left if all the Government's proposals go through? It will not be very much if they manage to get their legislation passed in the course of this Parliament.

There is little to indicate that the Welsh people will benefit greatly from the Bill, which is a will-o'-the-wisp. It is a measure that will impose obligations on a shrinking public sector, and its impact will progressively decline over the years. I am not sure that that is what the Secretary of State wants. If it is, he must realise that there will be mutterings all over Wales. It will be said that he is not fighting for Welsh interests, that he is fighting for his place in the reshuffled Cabinet and does not want his English colleagues to be able to say, "We don't want that chap to be Secretary of State for Employment or Secretary of State for the Environment: after all, he went native during his three years in Wales." The right hon. Gentleman will be open to such accusations unless he indicates that, from time to time—not all the time; just now and again—he is willing to take on conventional Tory thinking.

In this case he must recognise the importance of the Welsh language and say to his Cabinet colleagues, "Sorry, but we intend to impose public-sector obligations on utilities that have been privatised. I know that it is against Tory thinking, but we ought to make an exception in this case." If the right hon. Gentleman does not do that, he will not be fighting for Wales—he will be behaving like a conventional Tory and using Wales as a springboard for his next promotion. Well, we in Wales are not willing to be used in that way. We are not the right hon. Gentleman's platform for promotion. What we want is restoration of

the Welsh language to as near equality as possible without creation of the complications that would arise from full bilingualism. If we had full bilingualism in this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would have to say, "Order, Order. Disgyblaeth, Disgyblaeth." at the beginning of each parliamentary Session, and *Hansard* would have to be printed in Welsh. That is not what we want, though I am sure that, given your surname, you, Sir, have such dreams in the middle of the night. What we want is a measure confined to practical things to assist the restoration of the Welsh language to its rightful place, in so far as such a thing can be achieved by the law. But the impact must be felt in Wales, and not in England. The Minister's replies to interventions about the shrinking public sector were extremely unsatisfactory. This is a matter to which we shall have to return, as is the question of funding Welsh-medium education and the equally important conventional Welsh-language education in the Welsh-speaking areas.

We also want something more. On the composition of the membership of the board, reference was made in the other House to the need to take account of three categories —Welsh speakers, Welsh learners and non-Welsh speakers. That was it; the fourth category was missed. The other House forgot about what we might call the un-learners: people whose Welsh is rusty and will disappear if they do not do something about it. The recent market research study commissioned by S4C, the independent television channel in Wales, showed that that is quite a large category. Possibly there are as many as 500,000 people who speak a bit of Welsh but who would not fill in a census form to that effect because their Welsh is rusty. They may have learnt a little and then stopped going to classes, and they will not be able to speak Welsh in 20 years' time unless they do something about it. That category is numerous in industrial Wales. S4C said that it needed to do more for those people, and the Government need to do more for them. No one in the other House paid attention to that category which is numerous in the former coal-mining and steel-making areas of west Wales and in parts of north-east Wales.

The Government made a beginning in the other House and on Second Reading here. They have announced the identity of the chairman. They did not need to announce it because it became more and more obvious as time went by in the other place. We wish Lord Elis-Thomas well in finding the right colleagues. I hope that they will have a democratic input. Lord Elis-Thomas has been a tireless champion of the Welsh language around countless Hampstead dining tables. I hope that he can find colleagues who will be able to communicate as well as he does with some groups in the industrial areas of Wales, where perhaps the battle will be won or lost. We take that view not only because we represent those areas but because that is where the language has been declining.

We shall not go back into the question of the Committee of the Regions and the deal on the treaty of Maastricht. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] I was only going to say that it might be renamed the treaty of Malltraeth after the contribution of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) to its passage through the House by propping up the Government when they needed it most.

The problem will be overdependence on boards and schemes. Those are the buzz words in the Bill. They are almost like hymns and arias in Max Boyce's songs of 10 or 15 years ago. There will be over-reliance on boards and schemes which we in Parliament will have nothing to do with. The Secretary of State forgets that the key to the success of the Bill is education and jobs, and what happens afterwards to people who learned Welsh in school. We want an assurance that when the Secretary of State deals with the remaining stages of the Bill and makes appointments, he will remember that he represents a minority party and that his four Back Benchers arrived at the House today in enormous comfort in a Reliant Robin. He should realise that he needs to be able to sell the Bill to the whole population of Wales. We are not talking about Tory placemen who will support the Secretary of State, whether it is the right hon. Gentleman or someone else. He should remember that we are dealing with a measure which should satisfy the rightful demands of the whole nation of Wales.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance for those who may wish to catch your eye later in the debate? When my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) used three words of Welsh, it appeared that his microphone died. Can you give us a ruling on the use of the Welsh language in debates? There are precedents——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked me a question. May I answer it? He sought the guidance of the Chair. The guidance is printed clearly on page 365 of "Erskine May":

> "Speeches must be made in English, but quotation in another language has been allowed on occasion, though a translation should be provided."

That is as much for the protection of hon. Members as for the Chair, so that we may all know what hon. Members are talking about.

Mr. Flynn: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are precedents for the use of Norman French in another House, for the use of Middle English, which I have used, and for the use of French in quotation. At one time, there was a long quotation in Latin of several stanzas of Virgil's verse. If some hon. Members wish to quote in Welsh to illustrate the glories of Welsh literature, will that be in order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the greatest respect, the hon. Gentleman did not listen. He should listen carefully:

> "Speeches must be made in English, but quotation in another language has been allowed on occasion,"—

not automatically

> "though a translation should be provided."

The quotation and translation should be relevant to the Bill.

6.25 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): I rise with some trepidation, especially following the speech of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), whose logic and train of thought left me at times bereft of speech, which is unusual for me.

I hope that I meet the criterion of the hon. Gentleman in that I rise not as a conventional Tory. I can claim some right to speak on the Bill. My mother was brought up in Aberavon. She may have known the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) because they are, I think, of similar age. She spoke Welsh fluently. She taught me a little of the culture conveyed by that ancient language. From an early age, I learned that the language

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

was a vital part of the common heritage of England and Wales. Although my Welsh vocabulary is limited, sadly, to only a few choice words, such as "Fenlinfoel", I will support the Bill which is aimed at increasing the prominence of the language. This historic Bill will do just that. Its overriding intention is that the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality.

The word "historic" is indeed fitting to describe a Bill that repeals the Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The policy of those laws was to suppress the Welsh language and deny it a role in public life in Wales. The policy continued unabated for centuries. Even during the last century, speaking Welsh in schools was an offence for which a pupil could be beaten. A child caught speaking Welsh would be made to wear a pendant bearing the words "Welsh Not". The "Not", as it was called, was passed from offender to offender, and the unfortunate child wearing it at the end of the day received a thrashing. After 1862, when grants were given to schools if children passed tests in reading and writing in English, the "Not" was considered a vital piece of equipment by many teachers. Not having gone to a public school, fortunately I have never been the recipient of a good thrashing.

In spite of that onslaught, half the population could speak Welsh at the turn of the century. This century, measures to sustain the language have become a dominant cultural and political theme. The Welsh Language Act 1967 at last gave equal validity to the language.

A language directly descended from the Brythonic language, which was once spoken across mainland Britain and whose dialects were here long before the Romans arrived, has survived. We should be thankful that it has, for it harbours a vibrant literary tradition, especially in poetry and song. It enhances the cultural diversity that is so essential to our kingdom.

The nation owes this hardy, resilient language a duty of care. We should nourish and nurture it and ensure that it flourishes. There are already grounds for optimism. I was pleased to learn recently that the Welsh fourth television channel, S4C, which is just 10 years old, is watched by 67 per cent. of the population in the Principality. My broadcasting background has taught me how crucial television can be in sustaining a language. We must also give credit to BBC radio and BBC television in Wales.

The many community newspapers circulating in the Welsh-speaking part of Wales also play an important role, but above all education is now making a vital contribution. Some 15 per cent. of secondary schoolchildren in Wales now receive at least part of their education in Welsh. The national curriculum has ensured that all our children have the opportunity to learn Welsh.

In a recent survey for S4C, 70 per cent. of respondents between the ages of 12 and 15 said that they could speak some Welsh. That is encouraging, but we must not be complacent, because in the same survey the figure plummeted to 31 per cent. for 16 to 24-year-olds. Competence seems to fade when school days are just a memory. That is why the Bill is vital.

The language must not be treated by school leavers as an appendage to their lives, seen only on road signs or in shop windows. It must be common currency, an integral part of the community. The Bill makes great strides towards that goal. It constructs a framework for the promotion of Welsh in everyday life by requiring every public sector body to develop a scheme setting out the services that it will provide through the medium of Welsh. It gives statutory authority to approve those schemes to a Welsh Language Board that will be charged with promoting and facilitating the use of the language. It backs the board with the Secretary of State's powers to make the public body comply.

The Bill also provides that there is no restriction on the use of Welsh in legal proceedings and empowers Ministers to prescribe Welsh statutory forms. That all amounts to a powerful and wide-ranging attempt to foster the language.

The principle behind the Bill is that the Welsh and English languages should be treated equally. It is, of course, right that those for whom Welsh is the first language should be able to conduct their business with public bodies in that language. It is also right that those who would like to use the language should be given every encouragement to do so.

When the Bill's provisions are enacted, the school leaver who speaks Welsh will have a choice of which language to use. He cannot be made to speak Welsh, but he will see that the language is alive and well and not part of the curriculum that might as well be forgotten. As the hon. Member for Cardiff, West said, many words and concepts in Welsh cannot easily be translated into English. That in itself is an incentive to speak Welsh.

I congratulate the Government on two omissions from the Bill. It is sensible that the private sector has been excluded, because the people of Wales would not thank the Government if their business had to labour under new duties——

Mr. Alex Carlile: Why is it sensible to include the Post Office while it is in the public sector but to exclude it when it enters the private sector?

Mr. Fabricant: It will not necessarily be excluded. The hon. and learned Gentleman raised that matter earlier with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and, as he said, the matter will be discussed in detail in Committee.

No one in Wales would thank us if we forced private companies to incur new duties and extra costs that would not be experienced elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It was wise not to discriminate against the English speakers in Wales. The good will of the whole population has been safeguarded and the attractiveness of the Principality as a target for investment has been maintained. Hon. Members will agree that Wales is attractive to overseas investors.

Mr. Flynn: We are indebted to the hon. Gentleman for giving us the benefit of his experience of Welsh broadcasting gained during the weeks that he worked for Radio Caroline. The hon. Gentleman spoke about the private and public sectors. His party's declared policy is to reduce the number of civil servants from 500,000 to 10,000 through privatisation, contractorisation and market testing. Does he not see that if the Government have their way there will be no public sector?

Mr. Fabricant: Removing the burden from the state gives resources to the private sector. I remind the hon. Gentleman that Governments do not create jobs; they are created by the private sector. What the hon. Gentleman suggests would drive business from the United Kingdom generally and from the Principality in particular. I worked

for BBC Wales in Bangor and Cardiff for longer than I worked for Radio Caroline, for which I worked for two and a half weeks. It seemed to my listeners like two and a half years and to me, suffering from seasickness, it seemed like 25 years.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): I assure my hon. Friend that some of the most prominent supporters of the Welsh language are the public utilities, which have given superb service. There is no better example than Welsh Water, and there are others, such as British Telecom. There is no reason whatever for a public sector body to abandon its Welsh language policy when it becomes private.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his intervention.

I applaud the Government for spending more than £7·5 million to support the Welsh language and for offering in the Bill a bright future for a language that has enriched the kingdom for centuries. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it quite clear that he will listen in Committee to all views and will seek to fine-tune the Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.38 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Many years after I was born in Wales and had been taken to be brought up in Lancashire, I returned to Wales, first to work and then to live there. Some still say that those who are not good Welsh speakers or Welsh speakers at all face problems if they go to work in the public service or the professions in Wales. We must lay that bogey to rest early in the debate.

I have a little Welsh, but it is fairly abysmal and I wish that it were much better. From that position, I confirm that there is nothing to fear in the proposed legislation. We are not debating an exclusive matter; we are discussing a language and culture that, far from being exclusive, are strongly seductive. The only cause for fear about the Welsh language and culture is if they are corralled into provocative, defensive aggression. This measure—albeit much strengthened, I hope—could do a great deal to ensure that Welsh has its rightful place, not a suppressed place.

It is, therefore, a matter of satisfaction that the House is given the opportunity of debating the best ways to promote and protect the Welsh language, although I regret that we are debating the Government's Welsh Language Bill, not the Welsh Language Board's Bill. I thought that the board's Bill was a much better, a much more purposeful and determined effort to deal with the issue.

Much has been done for the Welsh language since in his 1962 speech "Tynged yr Iaith"—the fate of the language—Saunders Lewis advocated

"nothing short of revolutionary methods to protect Welsh."

Thankfully, a rapid evolution has taken place without the need for revolution.

The last three decades have seen the Welsh language thrive, at least in some sectors: in the arts, in sport, in the academic world and in parts of the media. However, there is still cause for concern about the development of Welsh in the printed media. In that sector, the Welsh Language Board can do a great deal to promote the universality of Welsh, which appears but rarely and in limited form, in national daily and weekly newspapers.

In the battle for survival, for that is what it has been, the Welsh language has shown that the pen and the mind are far mightier than the sword or the bomb could ever be. The most fluent pens and some of the highest of minds were much in evidence when the Bill was debated recently in another place. I am sure that anyone who listened to or read some of the speeches were heartened to hear so many of, shall we call them, the maturer Welsh dragons still breathing enough fire to frighten their English cousins and tormentors into supporting the Bill.

Some of their Lordships paid tribute in the other place to the Welsh Language Board. Without wanting to labour the point, I, too, applaud the board and support what the Secretary of State said about it. I also applaud very strongly the appointment of Lord Elis-Thomas as chairman of the board. Acceptance of that appointment in some parts of the House today has been very grudging. He is a man of high intellect and great ability, and he is still youthful enough—indeed, he is a mere teenager in terms of the other place—to give the board real energy. He is a worthy successor to his predecessor.

The number of people speaking Welsh today is increasing. In each of the present counties of Wales, more children are learning Welsh than ever before. Those who raise bogeys about the increase in the speaking of Welsh should note that today it is commonplace in a constituency such as mine, Montgomeryshire—I repeat "Montgomeryshire" for the benefit of the Secretary of State in his last days in that office—for a typical family to consist of monolingual English parents and bilingual Welsh and English-speaking children. Parents in my constituency encourage that trend, which I applaud.

The future of living Welsh clearly lies in the hands of schools and colleges where it is taught and of the children who learn it. I say with all the strength that I can muster that the role of the primary school in rural areas is crucial. Village schools are the very womb of the Welsh language. I hope that we shall hear the Minister of State—who, I know, is devoted to the Welsh language—confirm when he winds up the debate that he still believes that the village school has a valuable role to play.

Sir Wyn Roberts *indicated assent.*

Mr. Carlile: I am pleased to see the Minister nod in agreement.

Parliament also has an important part to play in the future of the Welsh language. In dealing with the Bill, we have an historic and rare opportunity. It is not every day that one has the opportunity to repeal statutes of Henry VIII. Now that we have that chance, we must seize it with both hands and not only get rid of historic surplusage but try to put in place legislation that will be an historic glory for the future.

I regret that I feel that the Bill does not quite live up to the occasion. It is perhaps a little bit like the current Welsh rugby union team: it promises a good deal but does not always deliver it. I hope, however, that our Committee proceedings will prove to be a little more auspicious than some of the recent meetings of the Welsh rugby union.

We must ask ourselves what we want from the Bill and what our aims are for the future of the Welsh language. I believe that we want the Bill to emerge from Committee as a friendly dragon, breathing fire into the Welsh language, rather than as a mere paper tiger—for that is how it looks at the moment.

If our aim were to allow the language merely to be Wales's answer to the Loch Ness monster—prehistoric,

[Mr. Carlile]

rarely seen and good only for tourists—the Bill as it stands would do the job. If, however, our aim is the more purposeful one of promoting Welsh among every sphere of social, economic and professional life in Wales, the Bill must be improved. At the moment, it pays homage to Welsh. More than homage is needed if the Bill is to have a real effect.

I draw the attention of the House to the fundamental issue of the very status of the Welsh language. I regret very much that the Bill stops short of stating categorically that the Welsh language shall enjoy equal status with English as the official language of Wales. That omission has rightly upset many people throughout Wales.

For the people of Wales, there is no real question about whether Welsh is equal to English; what is perplexing is why the Government are not prepared to enshrine that recognition in the Bill. The sad fact is that, unless it is enshrined, the Bill will not demonstrate to all comers, including those who have the most genuine concern, that Welsh is equal to English. Welsh must be, legally and officially, equal to the English language, otherwise it is bound to remain the second language in its own country. We have in the Bill the chance to correct that anomaly.

A start to correcting the anomaly would have been a statutory right, enshrined and entrenched, for all families in Wales to have their children educated through the medium of Welsh, if they wish it, wherever they live. That right is not in the Bill. I tell the Minister of State, in the hope that he will address the issue in his reply, that it is not enough for people living in Powys who wish their children to attend a Welsh medium school to be told that it is a matter for the local education authority. A lead on this is needed from the Welsh Office. That is the sort of responsibility that the House should shoulder, through the Bill.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Without being mischievous, if the hon. and learned Gentleman is arguing for a basis of equality and arguing, further, that there should be this right to have education in Welsh, should there not be a corresponding right to have education in English?

Mr. Carlile: What I have said is absolutely clear. The position as it is now is plain; I am arguing for a new right to be enshrined for us to have our children educated through the medium of Welsh if we wish.

Mr. Wigley: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the policy is for pupils of bilingual schools in both non-Welsh-speaking and Welsh-speaking parts of Wales—Welsh and English speakers alike—to have total fluency in both languages by the age of 11? Does he further accept that there should be an even-handed policy that gives both groups that opportunity in the community in which they live?

Mr. Carlile: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that point.

The setting up of a statutory Welsh Language Board has been welcomed throughout Wales and can achieve a great deal. I should like the board's functions to be extended so that it can provide practical services, such as translation and intepretation. I should also like the board to have sufficient funds to carry out research into the Welsh language and the best ways of promoting it.

I am convinced that membership of the board should be as broad as possible. I hope—again, without labouring a point that has already been raised—that, before appointing members of the board, the Secretary of State will consult as widely as possible local authorities, public bodies, Members of Parliament and others involved in Welsh life. I also ask the Secretary of State to try to ensure that there is a sufficient number of elected local authority representatives on the board.

I turn now, briefly, to the Welsh language schemes. This part of the Bill is like an unhatched egg: it could emerge as a swan or it might turn out to be an ugly duckling. There is very little in the Bill that suggests the form the schemes will take when they come into operation. I should like mother hen at the Dispatch Box to expand on the type of schemes that the Government envisage developing.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. and learned Gentleman has left out the intervening step, which is the production of guidelines by the Welsh Language Board. Those guidelines, on which the schemes will be based, will be approved not only by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but by this House and the other place.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the Minister for mentioning that, but it seems to me that he raises a question as to whether the autonomy and independence of the board will be guaranteed. The point that I was seeking to make was that the board should also be able to take practical steps to ensure that schemes are brought to fruition, rather than merely take the advisory step of devising them. I hope that some good ideas for schemes for promoting the Welsh language will emerge from Members of all parties when the Bill is debated in Committee. Many ideas are available—for instance, the idea of a scheme to give incentives to companies in Wales that are able to provide Welsh language lessons for their employees.

I turn to public bodies and the point raised by the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). It is entirely illogical, I suggest, for the Post Office to be required to meet one set of parameters while it is a public body and then be allowed to abandon every one of them when it moves into the private sector. I am not saying that it will; I hope that those who run the Post Office will have more sense.

I have little confidence in the future of British Rail or its successors in this context. We in central Wales seem to face the possibility of our railways—if they continue to exist—being run from Doncaster. I cannot imagine that there will be great enthusiasm for spending money to promote the Welsh language in that situation. In the other place, some wise minds and voices spoke of the importance of ensuring that the privatised utilities were required to maintain the same standards as public services. I hope that the Secretary of State and his Ministers will be persuaded to change their minds by what is said in Committee. Universal utilities such as gas, water, telecommunications and electricity play a self-evidently vital role in the everyday lives of people in Wales, and the Welsh language would benefit from their full co-operation in Welsh language schemes.

The Welsh language and its culture are the heartbeat of Wales. At the very least, Welsh—as Wynford Vaughan Thomas put it—adds an exciting note in a world of insidious and spreading standardisation. I believe, however, that that observation significantly understates

the reality. Welsh is more than a great, historic, ancient language; it is an evolving language as well. If we are to keep the heart of Wales beating, we must have an Act of Parliament that is up to the task—the task of preserving and extending a living language into the next millennium and beyond. I do not believe that we have that legislation yet, but I am glad that we have been given the opportunity to debate the issues fully. At least we have a basis on which we can improve during the Bill's later stages. I hope that we shall not fail the people of Wales in what must rightly be regarded as an historic task.

6.56 pm

Mr. Jonathan Evans (Brecon and Radnor): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who gave us an eloquent agenda for what will no doubt take place in Committee. In his cogent exposition, the hon. and learned Gentleman dealt with the issues in rather clearer detail than the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). Although I am bound to confess that I did not agree with all that he said, I believe that our views have much in common.

Let me now deal with the matters on which we disagree. We disagree in particular about the principle of the equal validity of the English and Welsh languages. I do not think that that is a great issue between the two sides of the House. I have read the *Hansard* report of the debates in the other place, and it is clear from what Ministers said there that legal technicalities led to the advice that was given. We can debate that in Committee, but it would be wrong for Wales to be left with the impression that the Government were reluctant to acknowledge the desire to move towards equal validity.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The issue of legal technicalities and legal advice is important. When we debated another Bill, we were given different advice at different times about an extremely important issue. Will not the hon. Gentleman at least admit that the legal technicalities discussed in the Lords might just as easily be overturned in the Commons, to enable discussion of the issue of real equal status for the two languages in Wales?

Mr. Evans: I do not want to spend too much time discussing the legal technicalities of equal validity on Second Reading; the matter should be debated in Committee. As the hon. Gentleman will recall, it was in Committee that legal advice relating to the European Communities (Amendment) Bill was discussed in detail.

Let me add, however, that the pitfalls have always been well understood. Paragraph 357 of a 1963 report produced by the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire states:

> "We found much informed opinion in Wales strongly in favour of the granting of 'official status' to the Welsh language though it was generally recognised that a precise definition of this concept, in the special circumstances attaching to the language in Wales could not easily be found."

I do not think that much divides us on the principle; the arguments about legal technicalities are best reserved for Committee.

Mr. Dafis: I am surprised that such a learned legal mind does not make a clear distinction between equal validity and equal status. Equal validity simply means that anything done in the Welsh language is regarded as equally valid. That is a much weaker concept than that of equal status, which implies an impulse actualy to do things in the Welsh language. That is a much stronger and infinitely preferable concept.

Mr. Evans: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not wish to be tempted to follow his remarks at this point. This is a Second Reading debate, and I want to make it clear that I support the principle of equal validity. We will discuss the legal technicalities in Committee.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery referred to the right to Welsh medium education. It is a problem common to us both as we share the same county council. That is not an attack on the council. Because it covers a sparsely populated area, it faces difficulties with the provision of Welsh medium education. My constituents can get access to it, but sadly they usually have to go outside Powys. As I understand the Bill, the quality of Welsh medium education available in Powys high schools could come within the remit of the board. That would be a powerful factor in dealing with the problems.

The hon. and learned Gentleman said that Welsh was not his first language—he has an understanding of Welsh, but is not a great Welsh speaker. I would not put my proficiency in Welsh as high as he put his, although I understand some Welsh. I make no apology for speaking in this important debate. I am a Welshman, I have lived and worked in Wales all my life, and I represent a Welsh constituency.

Together with at least nine other hon. Members, I am partly responsible for the Bill. A moment ago, I referred to the Council for Wales and Monmouthshire report published in 1963. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has it with him. All hon. Members have been liberally supplied with copies. He will recall that the 1961 census showed an alarming drop in the number of children aged five to 15 in Welsh schools speaking the Welsh language.

I declare an interest, as I must have been one of those children, as were the other nihe hon. Members to whom I referred. That acted as a catalyst for a number of events. One was the now infamous speech by Saunders Lewis, although I do not think that in history his contribution to the promotion of the Welsh language will be deemed as great as that of John Elfed Jones and Lord Elis-Thomas.

It has been said that the report reflected the culmination of a century of decline in Welsh speaking. Thereafter, a number of other reports have been produced. They have shown the two general reactions to legislation on this matter—proceeding either on the basis of co-operation, partnership and persuasion or on the basis of coercion.

Those two reactions are at the heart of the debate. The Welsh council argued that an important first step was to ensure that the right climate of opinion was created about the Welsh language. That certainly now exists in Wales. It generally has substantial support not just from Welsh speakers, but from the whole population of Wales. That is an important achievement.

Of course, a language cannot be imposed upon people. Hon. Members have suggested that the Government have a responsibility to introduce Welsh language legislation, and that that will somehow deal with the decline in the number of people speaking Welsh.

Mr. Fabricant: Is there not a dichotomy in that, when an institution tries to promote a language, at the same time it stops that language's flexibility, which prevents it from

[Mr. Fabricant]

becoming a modern language? I think especially of the Institute Francaise, which has tried to preserve French in aspic as a 19th-century language. In many ways, that has damaged its prospects as a language for the 21st century.

Mr. Evans: I certainly do not believe that this Bill will bring about that position. The whole thrust of my approach and argument is that the Government were right to proceed on the basis of carrying the majority of public opinion with them. They created a climate of support for the language, and moved to legislation only when they were sure of support for that.

Some hon. Members have referred to what has happened during the years of debate on the Welsh language. In 1978, a report was produced by the Council for the Welsh Language for a former Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris). It stated that there was

"a widespread desire for Welsh to continue as a living language. This should be achieved by reasoned persuasion and exhortation, not by compulsion."

That shows that the Government were right to foster the right climate for a revival of the Welsh language. It also answers the point mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery of assuaging the feelings that might otherwise arise from compulsion, which is sometimes advocated by the strident voices arguing for direct action in defence of the language.

That report made some specific recommendations. One of the most famous related to the urgency of proceeding to the creation of a fourth television channel. I did a little research on that, as I wanted to know how much the council thought it would cost the Treasury. There was a substantial underestimate. The cost was estimated at £9 million a year. I understand that currently S4C receives £55 million a year from the Department of National Heritage.

I make no complaint about that, but it gives the lie to the suggestion that the Government have been cheese-paring in their support for the Welsh language. I am grateful for the remarks of a number of people who do not share my political views, but nevertheless recognise the substantial support given to the language over a lengthy period.

For this debate, I read the *Official Report* of the Welsh Grand Committee on 16 July 1980, which was within a year of the Government coming to office. I was particularly interested in the observations made by my distinguished predecessor, the late Tom Hooson, who was then in virtually the same situation as I am—he had been the Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnor for a year. I noted his approach to the Welsh language at that time. He felt that it was the role of Government to help the language. However, he said:

"it is only the people who can will a future for the Welsh language."—[*Official Report, Welsh Grand Committee*, 16 July 1980; column 26.]

He felt that the influence within the home was important in that regard. He stressed, as has the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, the need for bilingual education to be developed.

We should pay due credit to my right hon. Friend the Minister for his work in promoting the language by placing Welsh on the national curriculum. Tom Hooson said that the Government could not force an unreal pace. At the time he was talking, Welsh was taught in only one secondary school in what I am proud to call—looking at the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery—the Radnorshire county council area.

Yet, when my right hon. Friend the Minister introduced Welsh in the national curriculum, and schools had the option to argue that, for some reason, they should be allowed not to participate, not one school in Radnorshire made such a request. That is a testament to the policy of the Government in carrying public opinion in what are termed the English-speaking parts of Wales.

Tom Hooson knew Radnorshire well and especially the Painscastle area, where last Saturday night and early Sunday morning I had the privilege and pleasure of being the president of the local eisteddfod, one that has been held for 25 years in that predominantly English-speaking part of Radnorshire. A number of people came from all over Wales to participate in the event.

One of the important subjects talked about that night was the role of the national eisteddfod, which is not only in receipt of local authority and Government support, but will be held in Llanelwedd in Radnorshire in August. In that English-speaking community, I find support and not hostility towards the Welsh language. That is why the policies that we have been advancing to promote Welsh language are right.

I shall now mention some specific points in the Bill. I pay tribute to John Elfed Jones, the chairman of the Welsh Language Board, for the work that he has done not only for that board, but for the Welsh language policies of Welsh Water. The point has already been made that we did not need to have an Act of Parliament, or a statutory big stick, to require Welsh Water to have a proper policy for the promotion of the Welsh language. I pay tribute to that, of course, not least because Welsh Water is based in my constituency.

John Elfed Jones has conducted himself with great dignity in his role as chairman of the Welsh Language Board, and I remember occasions on which he had to endure the very people, some of whom were perhaps mentioned by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis)—higher-profile members of the Welsh Language Society—berating him on the National Eisteddfod field. I have said, and I have no hesitation in repeating, that John Elfed Jones will be recalled as a man who achieved far more for the language than Saunders Lewis ever did.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The tribute to John Elfed Jones is well merited, but surely the hon. Gentleman misses the point that the policy of Welsh Water could be reversed tomorrow by the board.

Mr. Evans: During the debate, we have heard much about the need for an extension of language policy into a wide range of what are termed public bodies. The Government have made clear their position about public utilities, but it is as deception to claim that there are not provisions within the Bill to ensure that the Secretary of State has the power to involve organisations that appear to be public. Reference has already been made to that.

When I first read that, I wondered whether the Secretary of State would propose regulations involving Members of Parliament as well, because that would, according to my reading of the provision, be perfectly

legitimate. It speaks of any person, whether a body corporate or incorporate, who appears to the Secretary of State

"to be exercising functions of a public nature."

That seems to be an extraordinarily wide definition. If that includes Members of Parliament, there is no reason why it cannot include other organisations of a public nature, although the Government's position in relation to public utilities has been well ventilated.

The right hon. and learned Member for Montgomery mentioned the position of railways. The railways will be unaffected either way. Even if British Rail were to be included in the provisions of the Welsh Language Bill, it would have been included under that provision in paragraph (o), as it would be if any parts of the organisations were to be franchised out. So there is no distinction.

Mr. Alex Carlile *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Evans: The hon. and learned Gentleman must have misread the Bill, because the copy that I have clearly sets out in clause 6, between paragraphs (a) and (n), specifically defined public bodies, and British Rail is not one. There is a catch-all provision again under the power of the Secretary of State, in paragraph (o). If there was a provision to include British Rail, it would appear under that paragraph (o), and similarly, if we have a franchising of the service, it would be under that provision that anyone who argues that franchise organisation should be required to produce a scheme.

Mr. Carlile: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is right. The remarks made earlier by the Secretary of State in answer to this point suggest that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The matter was raised by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). Perhaps the Minister can clarify that important point when he comes to answer.

Mr. Evans: It is not for me to answer that point, but I saw the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who is always generous, nodding in assent at the observations I made.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I may be able to assist the House. The test, with regard to the applications of that subsection, is whether the body is funded from Government sources.

Mr. Evans: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

As a result of my generosity in giving way to so many right hon. and hon. Members, I have taken up more time than I had originally intended. I shall finish by reiterating what I think is the cardinal principle of importance on Second Reading.

In seeking to promote the future of language, we can do so on the basis of co-operation, or we can attempt to do so by coercion. Going down the road of coercion would not serve the interests of the Welsh language. The proposals in the Bill will work on a co-operative basis, so they ought to be commended to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose——*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I hope that all hon. Members who wish to speak will be called, but that will not be possible if each hon. Member speaks for more than 20 minutes.

7.18 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) made a sensible speech. He, like me, is a card-carrying member of the persuasion tendency, a theme that I hope to develop further during my speech.

We all come to the question of the Welsh language with our own personal baggage and histories. Some have had the good fortune to be brought up in Welsh-speaking households. Others have taken the initiative themselves to learn Welsh. I, alas, am a member of the missing generation who went to a traditional Welsh grammar school, where the Welsh section was corralled into one stream, the Welsh stream, and the rest did other things. I, for example, gave up Welsh for Greek at a tender age.

However, I recall that, when it came to history, we had a good bias for the language. My history master set the question, "1588 was a decisive turning point in history. Discuss." Those who discussed the armada had a reasonable mark, but those who discussed the translation of the Bible by Bishop William Morgan had a good mark. That shows that that single event in 1588 probably had a more decisive influence on the Welsh language than the statutes of 1535 and 1542 and that more informal elements may have a happier effect on the language than legislation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish me to remind the House that it was Parliament which, in 1563, required by statute that there should be a translation of the Bible into Welsh. It took a little time because, as the hon. Gentleman said, it did not appear until 1588.

Mr. Anderson: I stand corrected. Like most English speakers, in Wales I rejoice at the resurgence of the Welsh language. I am particularly delighted by the new self-confidence of our younger people, based principally on the greatly increased expenditure in our schools. That is a major sea change which the great majority of English speakers in Wales now accept as a new consensus. It is based on a recognition that the language is of inestimable value.

Diversity is important, and we are glad that new pressures in favour of Wales are also coming from the European Community. I have a nightmare that at some stage in the future we shall all be speaking in some mid-atlantic sameness of language—something which the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) seemed to welcome.

Welsh ceased to be the official language of Wales not by neglect but by law, by the Act of Union, and legislation is again needed to underpin the language and restore its official status. Therefore, I welcome the Bill. I shall be brief and skate over some of its key elements.

We learn that there will be up to 15 members of the Welsh Language Board. No figures have been given for expenditure on the board, nor do we know how large a proportion that will be of the anticipated total expenditure under the Act. The board is a quango and I hope that the Government will look carefully at relating it in some way to our local authorities. Perhaps the new unitary authorities can in some way act as an advisory body to the board, otherwise it will be rather cut off from democratic opinion in Wales.

I also hope that, in selecting members of the board, the Welsh Office will be careful to ensure that they are

[Mr. Anderson]

committed to the furtherance of the Welsh language and that they have sensitivities and are not zealots who can do immense harm to the language if they press too far.

I have no particular worries about the phrase

"appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable",

which is well known in law, the interpretation of which should not pose any great problem. I am more worried about the phrase "basis of equality". It is difficult to find any legal precedent for that. It will be interesting in Committee to hear precisely how the Government propose that that should be interpreted.

I asked the Secretary of State about the move from the public to the private sector. That has a particular resonance in Swansea at the moment because the driver and vehicle licensing centre may well, as a result of a Government decision which may be announced tomorrow, be transferred by way of contractorisation to the private sector. There are enormous anxieties in the city on that.

The Post Office is a particularly relevant example. It seems absurd in principle that obligations that are accepted by the Post Office when it is in the public sector should be dropped and that the Post Office should simply be subject to guidelines when it moves to the other side.

I am puzzled by the definition that the Minister has just given of those bodies exercising functions of a public nature in clause 6(1)(o). It is surely a distortion to suggest that bodies exercising functions of a public nature are limited to those that are financially dependent on the public purse. I should have thought that it would be difficult to sustain that in a court of law. I hope that the Minister will look again at that.

I concede that, when the Secretary of State rejected the applicability of the paragraph to the problem of the Post Office, he was speaking without notice, but I hope that the Minister of State will come forward with a revised standard version, a more definitive version, in Committee. But it may well be that he will be hung on the ideological point that there is the public sector and there is the private sector and we cannot sell off the Post Office or the DVLC if we impose qualifications because their purchase will be less attractive to the private sector.

That means that Mammon rules and that the Welsh Office and the Government are clearly giving second place to the language and first place to the ideology of moving back the frontiers of the state. I hope that the Government will consider that before the Committee stage. Substantial sections of the public sector—the Post Office and many other areas—because of market testing, are in danger of moving across the divide, across the frontier, and therefore outside the ambit of the board.

I end as I began. Happily, in Wales, we have avoided the extremes. But there are wings of people in Wales who, one way or another, have extremist views on the language. There are those in my county of west Glamorgan who rail against the betrayals on the part of the county council and there are those who show against the Minister of State at Eisteddfodau, so harming their case. Others simply look at this as a job for the boys and avoid the cultural dimension and the value of the language.

Happily, we have avoided such extremes in Wales. We have dealt with the language sensitively. There is what I call the doctrine of the evolving consensus in Wales. What happened with Hughes Parry which resulted in the 1967 Act was probably the consensus at that time. Happily, as the result of the underpinning of Welsh language education, the caravan has moved. The consensus has evolved now to a point where we can go substantially beyond Hughes Parry and the 1967 Act. Indeed, as an English-speaking Welshman, I believe that the consensus has gone beyond what the Government are now suggesting, and I have already mentioned the aspects that cause me concern. I believe that the language should be encouraged boldly, but with sensitivity and persuasion, underpinned by legislation only when necessary.

7.29 pm

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North-West): I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on the way in which he introduced the Bill. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on what is unquestionably an historic achievement in pioneering the Bill.

The Bill is the latest in a series of important measures introduced by the Conservative Government that have revitalised the Welsh language and for which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is directly responsible. In education, broadcasting and social and cultural matters, my right hon. Friend's contribution to the language has been immense. It therefore came as no surprise when Lord Elis-Thomas of Nant Conwy, the Plaid Cymru peer, said of him recently that he had done more for the Welsh language than anyone else this century. I was not shocked to find that Lord Elis-Thomas is to become the chairman of the Welsh Language Board. In addition to everything else that my right hon. Friend has done, the Bill will ensure his standing as one of the great Welshmen of his generation.

Having listened to the opening speeches made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), I think that there can rarely have been a clearer distinction between the spokesman of a mature party of government and a party of permanent opposition in terminal decline. The Bill is an excellent example of the art of the possible undertaken by experienced Ministers, in complete contrast to the Labour party which has forgetten what being in government is all about and, of course, to Plaid Cymru which has no experience of government to forget.

Having listened to the opening exchanges, I wonder whether the Bill goes far enough. Should it provide for a Welsh version of literature for Welsh speakers, an English version for English speakers and an illustrated version for the Labour party?

We recognise that the decline of the Welsh language this century can be reversed only gradually. Quantum leaps are not feasible. There is already evidence that Government policies have encouraged the language to make a come-back, especially among the young. The Government's education policy will ensure that the trend continues, but it would be a mistake to quicken the pace of change by forcing the language on a reluctant people. That would be resented, resisted and counter-productive in the long term.

The rehabilitation of the Welsh language needs the good will of the non-Welsh-speaking majority. If that good will were eroded, it would become correspondingly more difficult to persuade the English-speaking 80 per

cent. of the population to support measures and developments that they might consider at best pointless and at worst irritating. Therefore, the Bill strikes the right balance in view of the rate of progress made by the Welsh language as it regains the ground that it had been losing. It confers rights on those who wish to live their daily lives as fully as possible through the medium of Welsh, without imposing an irritating hindrance on non-Welsh-speakers. It is a realistic attempt to establish Welsh's equality with English.

Opposition Members must recognise that the Welsh language cannot be saved by legislation alone. Non-Welsh-speakers must also want the language to survive and prosper, but it will not do so if it is rammed down their throats. Therefore, my right hon. Friend is right to exclude the private sector from the requirement for public bodies to draw up strategies outlining how they are to use Welsh. The private sector already offers services in Welsh and, with encouragement, others will follow suit.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn) *rose*——

Mr. Richards: I shall not give way because, as Madam Deputy Speaker said, time is short, and many hon. Members of all parties wish to speak.

It would be wrong and wholly counter-productive to force the private sector to use Welsh against its will. Such a policy would not only create a barrier to inward investment but would provoke business to leave Wales. The outlook for the economy would be correspondingly depressed. As the language gains ground, it may be that, in the not-too-distant future, the private sector will be able to accommodate bilingualism more easily. I believe that it will and that it will want to embrace its heritage, but we must take care not to snuff out that possibility with legislation that could be interpreted as vindictive.

When I speak of bilingualism, I mean using the language naturally in day-to-day dealings. I fear that the zealots who do so much harm to the language and the image of Wales think that bilingualism means translating everything into Welsh—every sign, every leaflet and every form. That is humbug. All types of bilingual forms are in use in Wales, which probably no more than a few thousand people in the entire country could read in Welsh and fully understand. If we are honest with ourselves, we must accept that the vast majority of Welsh speakers do not use them, or even read them. They are no more than a totem pole around which the zealots dance.

Indeed, it is the zealots, so prominent in Plaid Cymru, who are the greatest danger to the language. These are the people——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Grow up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow private conversations or interventions of that kind from a seated position.

Mr. Richards: These are the people who——

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I make it perfectly clear that I made that intervention on the ground that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) was using inflammatory language about an issue that we had hoped would exclude party politics. The hon. Gentleman was inviting such an intervention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: In that case, the hon. Gentleman should rise and seek to intervene.

Mr. Richards: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, these are the people who try to use the language as a weapon with which to carve out an independent Wales. These are the people who refuse to recognise that the language belongs to all parties and to no single party. The zealots are mean minded and mealy mouthed, afraid of everything because of its perceived impact on the language. These are the people who are so obsessed that they believe that the language is more important than everything, even life itself.

These are the people who believe that their culture and way of life can and should be wholly isolated from the outside world so that the language is not endangered. These are the people who would put the nation into quarantine to protect the language. These are the people who, if they had their way, would succeed only in killing the language and destroying the Welsh nation. These are the people who despise the Government for their very success in securing the viable future of the language, while they can do nothing but wring their hands on the sidelines.

Some hon. Members believe that the Government are mistaken in their Welsh language policy because they are doing too much at too great a cost. There are occasions when I wonder whether the Government get the credit that they deserve for their commitment to the language, when competition between Government Departments for scarce resources is fiercer than ever. For example, S4C is subsidised by about £55 million a year. That is roughly equivalent to financing 100 embassies or consulates abroad, and that is at a time when we are doing our utmost to take advantage of the potential markets in the far east and in the new countries that make up the former Soviet Union.

In reply to those who would argue that the Welsh language gets a disproportionate share of Government spending, I would say that in 1982 my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister, justified—rightly, in my view—the retaking of the Falkland Islands, which had been invaded by the Argentines, on the ground that the 1,800 inhabitants were English speaking and wished to remain so. Baroness Thatcher said that that consideration was at the heart of the matter. The British task force, at great cost to the taxpayer and, ultimately, at great cost in loss of life, was dispatched 8,000 miles to fulfil our obligations to the English-speaking Falkland Islanders.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing the Second Reading of a Bill. Extended remarks along those lines are getting to the point of irrelevance.

Mr. Richards: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was just finishing.

I say to doubting hon. Members how much more compelling is the case for 500,000 Welsh speakers next door in Wales.

7.41 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Mae'n warth o beth nad oes gennyf fi, fel aelod seneddol o gymru, yr hawl i siarad fy iaith fy hun yn yr unig senedd sy'n deddfu ar ran fy ngwlad hyd yn oed mewn dadl sy'n ymwneud a'r iaith gymraeg.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I believe that the hon. Gentleman was here when my predecessor in the Chair made the rules of the House quite clear. I hope that I do not have to repeat them. May I ask the hon. Gentleman to continue his speech in English?

Mr. Wigley: I had availed myself of a translation of my speech, Madam Deputy Speaker, in case you requested it. I said:

"It is a disgraceful situation that I, as an MP from Wales, have no right to speak my own language in this, the only Parliament that legislates for my country, even in a debate concerning the Welsh language."

Had I addressed the House in Norman French I would have been in order, and that is a reflection on the status, or lack of status, of the Welsh language. That lack of status is the central issue in the debate on the Bill.

I listened to the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), and I dare say that Ministers will realise what a polarising effect and influence he would have if we ever had the misfortune of seeing him as a Minister at the Welsh Office.

The Bill has been long delayed. It represents the Government's response to a widespread campaign in Wales over the past 10 years and more for a new Welsh Language Act. The 1967 Act has long since been seen to be totally inadequate, as hon. Members on both sides of the House now recognise. As other hon. Members have said, that Act was based on the Hughes Parry report of 1965, which advocated equal validity for Welsh in speech and in written documents, both in the courts and in public administration. However, the 1967 Act provided for Welsh-speaking people only the ability to speak Welsh in the courts, with no rights regarding documents in court. There were no rights in connection with public administration. In other words, the 1967 Act fell well short of the 1965 Hughes Parry report.

Since then, the principle of equal validity itself has been shown to be inadequate. It was a step in the right direction at the time, but equal validity is a licence to allow all public bodies to do nothing whatever for the Welsh language and to do everything through the English language alone. Indeed, in order to give people who speak Welsh and who want to use the Welsh language the opportunity to do so, the institutions with which they deal must have a degree of bilingualism, to make equal validity meaningful for those individuals.

Over the past decade or more, people have called more and more for Welsh speakers to have language rights established in law, in a way that does not deny English speakers their rights. We are a nation with two languages. Both should have full and equal rights. Those who want to use Welsh should have the right to do so, certainly in dealings with the Government and public administration, with the courts and with public services, and with officialdom in general. In other words, Welsh should be as much of an official language in Wales as English. Individuals should thereby have full, free and unfettered choice of the language that they want to use.

On 1 July 1986, I introduced a ten-minute Bill to that end. It was supported by hon. Members from all four parties in Wales, and given an unopposed First Reading. At about the same time, Lord Prys-Davies introduced a similar Bill in another place. The details were slightly different, but the objectives were the same. He and I overwhelmingly agreed on our targets; the Bills were almost interchangeable. I pay tribute to the work that Lord Prys-Davies has done, both at that time and over the intervening period.

In October 1986—this is the prelude to the present Bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is why it is relevant —Lord Prys-Davies and I met Welsh Office Ministers to discuss the way forward for the two proposed Bills. The Secretary of State at that time, Nicholas Edwards, and the everlasting, evergreen Minister of State, who was there in his present capacity, met us and agreed to a public consultation exercise on the contents of the two Bills. That took place in the winter of 1986-87. By April 1987, when the consultation had been completed, about 2,000 responses had been received, of which only 43 objected to the direction in which the two Bills were going. However, it was 1988 by the time that the new Secretary of State for Wales, Peter Walker, said that, of course, there would be legislation. There has been a saga of prevarication and delay over the intervening period.

In the meantime, the Welsh Office set up an advisory panel on the language consisting of, I believe, eight wise people. They were consulted and they consulted people in Wales, and they recommended a new language Act. The Welsh Office then moved on and set up a Welsh Language Board in July 1988. It consulted again, and again recommended a new Act; indeed, it published a draft Bill in February 1991. There was wide consultation again, and that draft Bill was then regarded as a minimalist provision. However, it was not taken up by the Welsh Office, and last autumn in Cardiff 4,000 people from all parties demonstrated in favour of new Welsh language legislation.

Now, seven years after we introduced those Bills in 1986, the Government are moving forward with their own Bill. Their Bill does not even go as far as the minimalist Bill provided by the Welsh Language Board, and it is interesting to note what the board said about it. I pay tribute, as other hon. Members have, to the work of the board. When the Bill was published in December last year the board commented in its press release:

"The Government's Bill clearly fails to achieve the objectives set out by the Secretary of State in his statement to the House in February 1992 and falls well short of the Board's own proposals published in February 1991 . . . All Welsh MPs and Members of the Upper House will now have a key role to play. The Board urges them to ensure that the eventual legislation gives the language and the people of Wales a firm foundation of rights".

I emphasise the word "rights". Those were the considered comments of the board set up by the Government themselves to advise on the matter, after extensive consultation with the people of Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Unfortunately, one of the references in the Welsh Language Board's press release will not be true. Although it was right for the board to say that it was up to all Welsh Members of Parliament to improve the Government's Bill and to press for the measures suggested by the board, when we return after the recess we shall debate a measure that will take the choice away from Welsh Members. We shall not be responsible for the status and future of the Welsh language in Wales.

Mr. Wigley: Undoubtedly, on the Monday that we return, there will be a debate on that matter and strong feelings will be expressed. It goes without saying that I should like to see our own Parliament deciding these matters in Wales, but we must make the best of what we have. The House of Lords tried to amend the Bill.

Interestingly enough, the former Secretary of State for Wales suggested that the Government should make progress on the definition of status and a cross-section of peers voted in support of a change in that direction. However, we have not yet had that change.

I hope that the Government will be sensitive to these matters in Committee and will give ground because a number of the members of the Welsh Language Board were on the point of resigning if the Government had not given an undertaking to re-examine some of the details of the Bill. We are still looking for a fulfilment of the commitments given at that time. The Bill went through the House of Lords without any significant strengthening. The Government refused to accept amendments to improve the status and other shortcomings. The lobby in Wales has been overwhelming on a number of these points, but the Government have not yet moved on them.

At last we have the Bill before the House. We have waited 25 years since the last Bill and we need to get it right this time. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) said that there is not likely to be another Bill this side of the millennium. I hope that he is not closing the door to the possibility that, if this Bill is not strengthened enough and if the Labour party gets into government, the next Labour Government will provide their own Bill to do the necessary job. We would, however, rather see the Bill strengthened now and get it right in Committee.

Frankly, the Bill is extremely inadequate in its present form. It is little more than a Welsh Language Board Bill setting up a statutory board and relatively little else. It is worth drawing the attention of the House to the comments made by the Welsh Consumer Council:

> "If Welsh language policies are to be meaningful, and if legislation is to be useful, and if the ordinary consumer is to exercise choice in going about his or her daily life, the test must be that the Welsh language can be used in a normal and unproblematic way on a daily basis in everyday life."

The central question that arises—this has been the central objective of the campaign over the years—is to enshrine language rights in law. We need legislation to create and define the rights of those who want to use the Welsh language—some 500,000 people, although there are possibly 1 million people when one takes into account those who understand and speak some Welsh—and enable their children to have a bilingual education. After all, language belongs not simply to the Welsh speakers in Wales but to all the people in Wales. The Bill creates rights for one person alone—the Secretary of State. There are some limited rights for the Welsh Language Board, but they are subject to a veto by the Secretary of State.

We welcome the appointment of Lord Elis-Thomas as the new chairman of the board. We wish him well. If he is to undertake a successful job with the responsibilities that he has, he needs stronger legislation than what we have before us and resources to ensure that such legislation can be turned into meaningful reality.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Is the hon. Gentleman implying that Lord Elis-Thomas is ill advised to accept the post when we have such a weak Bill before the House?

Mr. Wigley: It may well be that Lord Elis-Thomas knows that the Government will accept strengthening amendments in Committee. Time will tell whether that is the case. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that Lord Elis-Thomas and members of the board—or whoever is chair of the board—will find it easier to do that job if the Bill reflects what is wanted in Wales and they have the resources to undertake their responsibilities.

As I said, the central inadequacy relates to the status of the language. I draw the attention of the House to the recommendations made by the Welsh Language Board in its draft Bill. The first clause in the Bill before the House should relate to the definition of status:

> "Welsh shall be an official language in Wales where in relation to English it shall be of equal validity for the purposes of the administration of justice and the conduct of administrative business so that, subject to the following provisions of this Act, any oral statement and any act, writing or thing made or done in Wales for those purposes and expressed in Welsh shall have the like effect as if it had been expressed in English."

That is a clearly defined legally thought-out statement and I do not understand why the Government have not been willing to take an unequivocal statement of that sort as the opening part of this Bill, rather than hiding it behind a sub-condition lower down in the Bill:

> "The purpose referred to . . . above is that of giving effect, so far as is both appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable, to the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality."

This contains a lot of qualification and uncertainty. We need a clear-cut statement as the starting point on which the Bill should be built.

The Bill must be amended if it is to be accepted by the Committee. There are a number of inadequacies, but I shall not go into them in depth. However, I shall refer to them in passing so that we can follow them up in Committee. For example, in courts of law, when the hearing is requested by the defendant to be through the medium of the Welsh language—that is, the hearing should be in Welsh as the predominant language—the jurors who are listening to the case should be able to understand Welsh. Public bodies should make available forms in a bilingual format. Public sector bodies that are now private utilities should be included in those public bodies. Clause 6(1)(o) defines that and I hope that it will be clarified by the Government in Committee.

There should be a definition of the right to have bilingual education within reasonable reach of people's homes. Most authorities do that and I pay tribute to them. I also pay tribute to people such as Lord Haycock in the old Glamorgan county council who did sterling work in that direction. Some areas are slow and dilatory. West Glamorgan is one of those areas in which there has been an outcry for many years to have a better provision of bilingual education. A right needs to be enshrined in law to overcome the difficulties in such areas.

There have been problems in the introduction of race relations legislation when jobs have been advertised as having a Welsh language requirement. Clearly, that is ridiculous in areas such as Gwynedd where a job was advertised for people to work in an old people's home. Overwhelmingly, the people in that home are Welsh speaking and there was a requirement for the job to be bilingual. That matter was taken to the Race Relations Board. There needs to be a change in the law to overcome that sort of abuse of race relations legislation to frustrate the Welsh language. The right of people to speak Welsh to each other in their place of work should be clarified, because it has caused difficulty in the past.

[Mr. Wigley]

Prisoners should have the right to converse with visitors through the Welsh language and to write and receive letters in Welsh. There should be no difficulty for parents who want to register their children's names through the Welsh language. Such practical difficulties have arisen in the past. If the Bill is to be acceptable, it must deal with those points. We must have a board that is independent of the Welsh Office, not a handservant to the Welsh Office. We must have a board to serve the whole of Wales and the Welsh language, not to serve the administrative convenience of the Government of the day. That will be achieved only if the Bill is substantially improved.

We have been under pressure, as have other hon. Members, to oppose the Bill on Second Reading. We will not do that because we believe that it can be improved in Committee. When we eventually get to Third Reading we will determine our attitude on the basis of what improvements have been made along the lines that I have outlined and those to which many other hon. Members have referred.

7.59 pm

Mr. Roger Evans (Monmouth): I welcome the Bill, and applaud the careful and thoughtful way in which it has been prepared, and the way in which it has met the practical and careful aspects with good will and co-operation.

I must nevertheless raise two points with my right hon. Friends upon which I seek reassurance. The first is the particular position of my constituency. Monmouth is not Gwynedd. Its traditions are different. In the 1991 census from Monmouth borough—that is not quite the same area as my constituency—only 2 per cent. of people returned that they were Welsh speakers. Monmouth borough council receives about six letters a year in Welsh and I understand that, as a matter of courtesy, those letters are always replied to in Welsh. The position in Monmouthshire is different. Clause 5(2) of the Bill describes schemes which are

"appropriate in the circumstances and reasonably practicable".

Will my right hon. Friend the Minister give an assurance that what is suitable for Gwynedd will not be imposed upon Monmouth, and that matters will be looked at sensibly?

I shall describe to my right hon. Friend and to the House the points that some of my constituents have emphasised to me. First, despite the great concern of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) and as he will appreciate, the practice of British Telecom, Welsh Water and South Wales Electricity is to submit bilingual bills. Some of my constituents are not very pleased with that. Secondly, my constituents complain that the national curriculum for Wales introduced compulsory Welsh teaching by the back door, in the sense that the impact of that was not appreciated in my constituency until it had happened. I am asking for special consideration for Monmouthshire.

My next point is slightly more exotic. I ask my right hon. Friend to re-examine schedule 2 to the Bill, which puts a piece of dynamite under what the Government intended. The schedule of repeals refers to the Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542, in each case the extent of repeal is the whole Act, so far as unrepealed. I have checked with the Library how much of each Act is still in force. No doubt someone will have to double check this, but let us be absolutely clear what the Government are proposing. If we repeal an Act of that kind of date, the effect is to make it as if the Act had never been passed, except as to matters which are past and dead. It would be startling and shocking if we were told that Wales was dead and past or even that the Welsh language was dead and past.

Let us examine the provisions of the Laws in Wales Acts. Section 1 of the 1535 Act says:

"That his said countrey or dominion of Wales shal be stonde and contynue for [ever] . . . incorporated united and annexed to and with this his realme of Englande."

[Interruption.] The nationalist Members are right to cheer. My right hon. Friend—I am sure, by mistake—seeks to repeal the Act of Union. That has the most startling legal consequences. The 1535 Act goes on to deal with the rights of persons born after the passing of the Act, a matter which was of considerable importance before the Act of Union with Scotland.

I am sure that if the House sought to repeal the Scottish Act of Union by a schedule of incidental repeals, there would be satisfaction in some quarters and howls of protestation in others. The repeal of the Laws in Wales Act has nothing to do with the Welsh Language Bill. I can go further. The test that those responsible for statutory repeals apply is whether a provision in legislation is past or spent. It is a logical and legal absurdity that the rights of persons born after the Laws in Wales Acts should continue to be what they were before.

If there has never been an act of union with Wales, how can later legislation ever have been intended to apply to Wales? That has several ludicrous political and legal consequences. I shall not deal specifically with section 3 of the Laws in Wales Act 1535, which imposes on my constituents the obligation

"to be obedient and attendaunt to the lorde chauncellour of Englond, the Kinges justices, and other of the Kinges moste honorable counsaile".

That may be dealt with now in specific legislation. Monmouthshire's position may be separate.

However, it is worse than that. In section 47 of the Laws in Wales Act 1542, the law on markets overt is vastly superior in Wales to that in England. The medieval anomaly and scandal that a person could go and buy stolen goods in certain markets in England and get a good title was not part of the laws of Wales. It has not been since 1542. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister did not intend by a backwind to do that.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I draw my hon. Friend's attention to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about the repeals. They are repeals of the spent provisions of the Laws in Wales Acts 1535 and 1542. We have been advised on the matter by Law Commission staff. We are examining carefully the markets overt point and we shall come back to it in Committee.

Mr. Evans: I respectfully suggest to my right hon. Friend that the advice given is wrong. The repeals section refers to the whole of each of the Acts, as unrepealed. It does not refer simply to those matters which one might think were relevant—those relating to the Welsh language. Those provisions were repealed 50 years ago. They were the notorious sections of the legislation which were so rightly criticised in Wales.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister has admitted that the section relating to markets overt is

relevant and current law and that to change it would be a policy change. I am delighted to hear that it will be investigated.

I have drawn the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) to this matter, and he is worried about it. Under section 56 of the Laws in Wales Act 1542, Bewdley shall be part of Worcestershire. There is a saving for the inhabitants of Bewdley, however, covering

"all suche liberties and frauncheses as they lawfullye had and exercysed within the same towne before the making of this Acte".

I do not suppose for a moment that the Welsh Office or those responsible for statutory repeals have examined the customs and privileges of the inhabitants of Bewdley. Likewise, those customs and privileges should not be taken away by a backwind.

I shall not continue this analysis. The City of London will be most interested in reviving the concept of the Welsh mortgage, which was also outlawed. It was a much fairer financial arrangement than many conventional mortgages. I suppose that those responsible for statutory repeals would say that the Welsh law of alienation of land or in the Welsh law for the descent of real property is spent. If that is right, it is an interesting matter. I am sure that nationalist Members who are learned in law will be interested to know the consequences of the Bill being passed in this form.

Mr. Wigley: We will take it to the courts.

Mr. Evans: I am delighted to hear that. That sedentary observation that the matter will be tested in the courts is right. I have no doubt that, by a blunder of those who advise on statutory repeals, my right hon. Friend the Minister has got us into an unnecessary predicament.

We have rightly heard a great deal about the traditions of culture and language of our country. However, I place infinitely greater importance on another part of our tradition than do those responsible for statutory law revision, who seem intent on ripping passages from the record of what Parliament has achieved over the centuries simply to shorten the law books and increase the profits of Messrs Butterworths.

The preface to the 1535 Act is one of the noblest pieces of English Tudor prose. It is rather pro-Welsh if one reads it carefully. I shall not weary the House by doing so, but I finish with a request to my right hon. Friend the Minister to reconsider both points.

8.9 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Welsh is spoken with pride across my constituency. In many valley villages such as Rhifawr, Cwmllynfell, Cwmgorse, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, Lower Brynamman, Ystalyfera, Godrergraig, Trebanos, Alltwen—I am pleased to say that it now has a Labour county councillor—Gellinudd, Blaendulais and many other communities in the Neath area, Welsh is the first language of many families.

It is important to remember, however, that in those former mining communities the Welsh language is part of a distinctive valley culture, which is treasured for its principles of mutual aid and co-operation. That culture is now under siege from economic decline and social disintegration. I support the welcome growth in the use of the Welsh language, but my only concern is that it is ceasing to become a working-class one. The Welsh Language Board and the Welsh Office must address that problem, otherwise the board will not be representative of the entire population of Wales, particularly those valley villages that were once thriving mining communities in which the Welsh language was an integral part of daily life. As testimony to our commitment to the language, we will welcome the National Eisteddfod to the Neath valley next year and I hope that it will be the most successful one ever.

The Bill is an important step forward along the road away from the bad old days when the use of the Welsh language was repressed. It has many defects, however, which the Labour party has already identified and which I hope we shall be able to address in Committee. For example, all powers to enforce the Act will lie with the Secretary of State and not the board, which is specifically designed to be an advisory body. That means that the Welsh Office will retain the discretion to interpret and enforce the Act. Although all that power is given to the Secretary of State and the Welsh Office, an anomaly is created because the Secretary of State cannot be prosecuted under the Act.

It is also important that the new board should be made up of individuals with the relevant expertise and not stuffed with Conservative placemen and women. I wish Lord Elis-Thomas well and congratulate him on his appointment—after all, it is better to have an ennobled deal on the Welsh language than a grubby deal on Maastricht. It is important that the Secretary of State gives full representation to all opinion in Wales and not simply to those with whom he happens to be in coalition at a particular time or those who happen to be drawn from the ranks of Conservative lackeys.

One of the main defects with the Bill, as has been identified by several hon. Members, is that its provisions relate to public bodies only. That leaves a big question mark over what will happen to the privatised utilities—gas, telecommunications, water and, who knows, the Post Office. British Rail is certainly in an anomalous position, because the subsequent Act will apply to it for the few remaining months of its life in the public sector, but will cease to do so once BR transfers to the private sector. That is absolute nonsense.

The Government have committed themselves to examine the possible privatisation and deregulation of the Post Office—in effect, they have given it the green light. The Post Office will, therefore, be covered by the Act only while it remains in the public sector. The same would apply if just a part of the Post Office, such as Royal Mail Parcelforce, were privatised, while its counter services remained in the public sector. What about those parts of the Post Office that were hived off into the private sector?

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The hon. Gentleman has sought to make some distinction about the railways and the Post Office moving into the private sector. If he reads the Bill, however, he will understand that they are not covered by it other than under clause 6(1)(o), subject to the discretion of the Secretary of State. They are unchanged by the Bill, because, if they move into the private sector, the Secretary of State can then decide whether they should be covered by the Bill.

Mr. Hain: I do not believe that that interpretation is incorrect, but the Minister of State was not positive about that issue when the hon. Gentleman raised the matter

[Mr. Hain]

earlier. There are too many grey areas and too much fudging in the Bill, which we will need to explore in Committee.

It is important to note that almost one third of the citizens in my constituency speak Welsh. Many will welcome the progress towards proper recognition of their language that is offered, to some extent, by the Bill. We have an excellent Welsh secondary school, Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera, in my constituency and virtually all the Welsh primary schools are overflowing. There is a tremendous demand for more places in Welsh-medium schools and more resources for Welsh language education. It is a matter not just of more classrooms but of better quality textbooks, better training for teachers and better resourcing of education; in that way, Welsh language teaching will enjoy equal status with English teaching in Wales.

Although it is important that the Welsh language receives the legal recognition and status to which it is entitled, a living language needs more than the backing of the law; it needs the resources which the Government have so far denied it and which the Bill does not provide. We want a language that is indigenous, not elitist, one that is living, not academic, and one that is part of the community, not imposed on it. That requires the firm backing of the law, but, together with that firm foundation, it demands a tolerance that springs from a new confidence that the rights of Welsh speakers are, at last, to be guaranteed.

8.15 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): When I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), I thought that he went a little over the top, until I heard the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). I should like to hark back to the consensus that seemed to exist among the other hon. Members who have spoken. It is clear that the temperate speeches of other hon. Members revealed a need for the Bill and that persuasion rather than coercion is likely to be the best way in which to further the interests of the Welsh language.

It is impossible to please everyone with the Bill because of the different nature of different parts of Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) rightly referred to that when he said that just 2 per cent. of his constituents were Welsh speakers. In some parts of Wales more than 60 per cent. of the local people are Welsh speakers, but, according to the latest available statistics, there are only 5·9 per cent. of Welsh speakers in my constituency. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth that we should take into account those parts of the country where Welsh is not widely spoken.

I welcome the resurgence in the use of the Welsh language that has occurred in the Vale of Glamorgan. The grandparents and parents of many of my constituents can speak Welsh, but they do not. They hope that their children, or at least their grandchildren, will do so. The resurgence in the Welsh language is due, in large measure, to the success of the measures introduced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has laboured hard in support of the Welsh language throughout his political career.

If we are to continue to move forward, however, it is important to avoid unnecessary division. Division would be bound to be created if we foisted on the private sector a requirement that it introduce a policy for the use of the Welsh language. Any business that is trying to make a profit will recognise that if its customers want communications to be in Welsh or if it wants to be able to communicate to them in Welsh, it will be in its commercial interest to ensure that Welsh enjoys equal status with English. Surely that is the way forward rather than coercion and diktat from central Government.

I was interested in the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth about the Bill's constitutional implications. I shall certainly be interested to see what the Standing Committee makes of it.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I shall add one point that I did not make in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) and say that I am assured that the Union of England and Wales no longer depends on the laws that we are proposing to repeal. That unity is based on subsequent legislation—which probably includes the Bill.

Mr. Sweeney: In the Vale of Glamorgan we are seeing a resurgence in the Welsh language. One reason for that is the widespread recognition that Welsh schools generally provide a high standard of education. I see a parallel between schools providing Welsh in south Glamorgan and schools such as my own grammar school in England which provided Latin in years gone by. Even if the learning of a language is an intellectual discipline rather than a necessity for communication, it stretches the intellect and helps people to learn other subjects. The mere fact that people have grappled from an early age with two languages instead of one seems likely to mean that they will make better students.

It is essential for the Committee to consider the distinction between Welsh being learnt—as Bacon would have it—as an ornament and Welsh being learnt because it is an inherent part of the local culture. If we can bridge that divide in a spirit of fellowship and with a recognition of the differences that exist between different parts of Wales, we shall be more effective in making the Bill a success.

8.22 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) and was extremely disappointed that he picked up on the constitutional issue. It was something that we noticed some time ago, but did not raise.

On a more serious note, Welsh is one of the oldest living languages in Europe, which is remarkable. It is all the more remarkable because, until this century, it has not been given fair play. Hon. Members have referred to the Welsh "Not". Several attempts have been made to annihilate the language, but now the Welsh language appears in every walk of life in Wales—there has been a welcome resurgence in the language.

I agree with the Secretary of State that there is a vast reservoir of good will in the country towards the language. I congratulate everyone who learns the language. It gladdens my heart when people move to my constituency

and learn the language, often in concert with their children. To them, I say, "Thank you for your effort and congratulations."

Last year, 60,000 plus people registered on various courses in Wales to learn Welsh. That is an astonishing figure of which I am proud. I am sure that the credit for it is shared equally throughout the House. The issue is not a political one and I am pleased that hon. Members are not treating it as such. From my upbeat preface, people might be tempted to think that all is well but, regrettably, all is not well. Every citizen of Wales and of the British Isles has a duty to nurture and maintain the language and culture of Wales. Welsh was the intrinsic language of the British Isles well before the Anglo-Saxon influence—a fact that is sometimes forgotten.

I have said that I am glad that the debate has not been about politics, and that Welsh is not a political football. However, the reference of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans) to Saunders Lewis was offensive to many people, perhaps not in the Chamber, but all over Wales. I am a great respecter of Mr. John Elfed Jones, the chairman of Dwr Cymru, and I am sure that even he would not wish to have heard what was said earlier.

I mention in passing the remarks—as usual, that is all that they are worth—of the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) which were immature, offensive and politically motivated. I have cleared my chest and shall now get on with the business in hand. If the hon. Gentleman had done so, we would have arrived at our business earlier.

Seven years have passed since my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) presented his Bill to the House. I echo his generous, honest and sincere tribute to the work carried out by Lord Prys-Davies at that time. We have had an agonising wait in Wales, and we have now been presented with a woefully inadequate Bill. We have a golden opportunity and we must grab it. If we miss it, the consequences will be dire. If the Bill is not comprehensively amended and strengthened, Wales will have waited for nothing, not just for seven years but for many centuries.

There is little in the Bill to make one cheer. We have an opportunity to take positive steps to ensure that the language is safeguarded and nurtured and that, as the Secretary of State said, the continued renaissance of the language proceeds apace. Therefore, although I am pleased that the Bill has come before Parliament, I have to say that it is inadequate in many ways.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon and other hon. Members have said where they believe the Bill to be inadequate. I shall confine my remarks to a few parts of particular concern to me and to many tens of thousands of people in Wales. I must make it abundantly clear that the list of subjects to which I shall refer is not exhaustive—far from it. I wish that I could say that only a few amendments were necessary, but I cannot.

The Bill's inadequacy has prompted several groups and societies, and thousands of Welsh people, to urge Opposition Members, and no doubt Conservative Members, to reject the Bill ab initio and vote it down. In discussion with the Bill's opponents, I have taken the view that if Parliament is about making laws that are just and equitable, the Bill must surely be amended. I trust that that faith in the parliamentary system will not prove to be misplaced.

I believe that the Bill should carry a clear definition of the status of Welsh in relation to the English language. That point was forcefully made by Lord Crickhowell in another place. As a former occupant of the Welsh Office, he could see nothing detrimental in such a definition, and representatives from all parties in the other place felt that it was right and proper. I do not understand why the Bill does not state that Welsh should be an official language in Wales, having equal status with the English language in the administration of justice and the conduct of administrative business. That issue was mentioned by the Welsh Language Board. The Bill should seek to address the current imbalance—there is no doubt that parity between both languages cannot and will not be achieved unless it is clearly embodied in the Bill that Welsh is an official language in Wales.

The Welsh Language Board's report of February 1991 was discussed and extensively quoted in another place. The report says:

"Unless it be declared by an Act of Parliament that the Welsh language shall have equality of status with the English language, it will continue in its existing state of inequality."

Paragraph 37 says:

"Without such a declaration, the Welsh language will remain bereft of official status and will continue to be perceived as being inferior, in all legal and administrative respect, to the English language."

The import of those words could not be clearer. They are the words of a board that the Government set up to give advice on the subject of the Welsh language and how to nurture it. It is astonishing that the board's view, clear and strong as it is, and based on good sense, appears to have been dismissed out of hand by the Government. We as a party will definitely table amendments to fill this serious lacuna in the Bill. Without such a declaration of principle, the Bill, which seeks parity for the languages, is fatally flawed.

This is our opportunity, and I urge hon. Members on all sides of the House to take it, otherwise we shall be criticised for having taken part in a legislative process that failed the people of Wales. As Lord Prys-Davies said in another place, the fruit of failure could be bitter. In my view, this is a core issue that must be addressed.

On the all-important subject of Welsh-medium education, the Bill contains no provision concerning the rights of individuals. The Welsh Language Education Development Committee recently expressed specific concern about this issue. It did so in a letter to Lord Prys-Davies, which referred to the fact that the board would have insufficient power in respect of bodies responsible for education in Wales. The letter said:

"There will be insufficient power to establish Welsh-medium provision in accordance with parental wishes where it is not currently available . . . The board will not have sufficient power to require funding councils for further and higher education to recognise the costs of providing for students who would opt to pursue vocational and professional courses through the medium of Welsh or, indeed, for employees who would be keen to see training in both Welsh and through the medium of the Welsh language in order to respond to the demands of the public."

These concerns are vital. Parents throughout Wales have shown that they, too, are greatly concerned about the lack of forward planning and funding to satisfy the—thankfully—rapidly increasing demand for Welsh-medium education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that Welsh-medium education is provided for in section 8 of the Education Act 1944, which lays duties on local authorities and, possibly, the funding council, if it is

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

established by my right hon. Friend. The duty of the Welsh Language Board will, of course, relate to the performance of the local education authorities and the funding council.

Mr. Llwyd: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the woefully inadequate provision in many parts of Wales—west Glamorgan, for example—is hardly what the 1944 Act foresaw. I accept the right hon. Gentleman's historical reference, but it does not give me any confidence whatsoever. The point should be mentioned specifically in this Bill. It is clear that, in terms of the provision of Welsh-medium education, some authorities in Wales are completely devoid of respect for the language. It appears that they have failed with complete impunity in this regard —a point that the Minister may wish to consider.

Recently, parents in Cardiff protested about the lack of provision for Welsh-medium education. Indeed, there are plenty of other examples throughout Wales. In some cases, Welsh-medium education is conducted in corridors and in various other locations that place children at a gross disadvantage. There are two sides to the coin, however: this shows that the provision is inadequate, but it shows also that the demand exists. I submit that the demand must be met, and this is the vehicle for making that point clear.

The situations in which the provision is inadequate create understandable animosity. They are concerns that the European charter for regional or minority languages sought to address. Article 8 of that charter provides that member states should make pre-school education, primary education and university and higher education available in the relevant regional or minority languages and should make a substantial part of that education available in the relevant language. That appears to me to be just and correct. The Government have decided not to sign the charter. I have written to the Secretary of State about that point, but I have been given no assurance that the Government will sign. It is ironic that, apparently, the Welsh language is safer in the hands of the European Community than in the hands of the British Government. We as a party supported Maastricht throughout. How right we were!

Welsh language education is assured, according to the Minister of State. He says, and has said in another debate, that being a constituent part of any Welsh language scheme is a matter that falls within clause 6. My view—and that of many others, I am sure—is that this vital provision must be separately spelled out. It is far too important an issue to be left to an agreement between the board and local education authorities, some of which, as I have said, are less than enthusiastic about the language, and have shown that to be the case.

The basic right of parents to secure the provision of Welsh-medium education for their children within a reasonable distance of their homes should and must be safeguarded and specifically provided for in the legislation. Will the board find it easy, for example, to discuss and approve individual language schemes for all the new unitary authorities if or when they come? Is it good sense to have 20 to 25 different education language schemes and policies in Wales? Would not it be much simpler to give here and now, in a separate clause, a pledge that parents have a right to have Welsh-medium education provided for their children within a reasonable distance if that is what they require?

If—God forbid—the schools of Wales were all to opt out, the task would become even more ridiculous; then we should have to deal with approval for, I suppose, 2,000 language schemes and policies. Common sense says that that would be ridiculous. In my view, justice for the language also says no. We should be faced with a bureaucratic nightmare, and in the meantime parents' legitimate rights and aspirations would be denied—that would be intolerable. If, as the Minister of State says, the provision of Welsh-medium education is already safeguarded by the wording of the Bill and if, as he says, that is the Government's intention, why should not we be given a clearer exposition to allay the fears of thousands of people in Wales and to avoid the administrative nightmare that must surely follow? After the inordinate delay in presenting the Bill to the House, we owe it to the people of Wales to provide them with the strong, clear Welsh Language Act which they require and which is no more than they deserve.

Another grave shortcoming of the Bill is the lack of provision for empanelling Welsh-speaking juries. This goes to the core of the question of status. In 1575, no less a judge than Sir William Gerrard said that a judge in Wales should be able to understand what a Welsh-speaking witness said in the language spoken—not, it will be noticed, through an interpreter. That is the basis on which the Juries Act 1974 was passed—every juror should understand what is said in English. If there has to be a choice between the hurt feelings of the potential juror and the need for justice to be done, the scales are overwhelmingly weighted in favour of justice. Instantaneous translation, however expert, will not catch the nuances of the original language. As everyone who has taken part in or conducted a trial knows, frequently nuances are everything. The random selection of arguments by the Government, echoed by Lord Ferrers in the other place, is not valid in this context.

The right to a Welsh jury trial is no more a breach of the principle of random selection than was the Privy Council decision in Ras Behari *v.* the King-Emperor, which was decided in the 1930s. The ratio decidendi was that all jurors empanelled to hear a case in the English language should understand English.

I referred to the point as being a core point. Indeed, in the debate in the other place, it was said that if the right was not enshrined in the legislation, the words about equal validity and about both languages being official would be exposed as a sham. Those were robust words, bearing in mind the forum in which they were spoken, but I have to agree with that view.

The Second Reading debate is not the time to argue about the minutiae of the Bill, but there are strong arguments to counter the objections of random selection, demography, injustice to non-Welsh speakers and others which may come from the Government Benches. My hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon, in a powerful speech, mentioned other concerns, as have other hon. Members. Regrettably, there is a myriad of points to consider; they will have to be addressed if the measure is to be meaningful.

I wish to touch on two other concerns: the right of a Welsh speaker to speak Welsh unimpeded wherever he is, including the workplace, and the need for reform of part of the Race Relations Act 1976. Recently, there have been examples of employers telling employees that they must not speak Welsh at their place of work. Two such examples

occurred in my constituency. They caused widespread offence throughout Wales as well as anguish to those involved. The Bill should be amended to make such behaviour a criminal offence, because in normal parlance it is an offence, so that we do not witness such potentially divisive and harmful actions again.

There have also been cases where employers have advertised for Welsh-speaking staff. There are key areas where staff are required to be Welsh-speaking. We should remember that Cyngor Dosbarth Dwyfor conducts all its business through the medium of Welsh; it is to be applauded for that. Recently, there have been celebrated cases where unsuccessful applicants, knowing that posts required Welsh speakers, applied for them and subsequently sought recourse in the courts for not being appointed. I believe that the Race Relations Board supported at least one case.

Section 1 of the 1976 Act should be amended to provide for a declaration that, for the purposes of section 1(b) of the Act, a person does not discriminate against another by reason only of the fact that that person applies to another person the requirement or condition that he or she be able to communicate in Wales through the medium of the Welsh language. Such an amendment is necessary to clarify a position which is at best a grey area and which at worst will lead to misunderstanding and antipathy which can only be divisive and harmful.

I reiterate that there is an enormous pool of good will towards the language. Like other hon. Members on both sides of the House, I seek parity for Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers. We are not asking for more. We are asking to be placed in the position that people were in prior to the Act of Union 1536. I urge all hon. Members to respect the rights of Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers in Wales, to make sure that they are protected and to ensure the continued recovery of the language which is so close to the hearts of the people of Wales. Failure to strengthen the Bill will mean that a golden opportunity is lost, perhaps for ever.

8.44 pm

Mr. Sebastian Coe (Falmouth and Camborne): I do not wish to detain the House long. I hope within a short time to be on my way to my Celtic constituency, not across the Severn, but across the Tamar. I do not speak as a Welshman, a Welsh speaker or a constitutional lawyer; nor do I wish to bring into question the Act of Union.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) was right to point out that it is incumbent on hon. Members apart from Welsh Members to enhance the development of the Welsh language. I read with interest the other day a quote from Wittgenstein, not the normal bedtime reading in my constituency, which sums up the debate:

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

Language liberates and furthers understanding. When it is taught well, it can improve national prestige and interest; when it is taught badly, it hinders and can even incarcerate and imprison. The language of any nation is in itself the main proof and touchstone of the country's existence as a separate nation, or at least as a separate identity. To all intents and purposes, it is the very embodiment of nationhood.

I welcome the Bill. It is good that the Government recognise the importance—I have to choose my words carefully—of a minority language. They recognise that there is a philosophical and practical approach to enhancing language. The Welsh language is a vibrant working language, which makes a vital contribution to the cultural breadth of the Union. Hon. Members from both sides have made articulate and important contributions.

It has been pointed out that over the last century Welsh as a spoken language has been on the decline. The 1991 census shows that the decline has been arrested.

Like the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), we can take some comfort from the fact that the language is being taught in 80 per cent. of primary schools and 90 per cent. of secondary schools. There needs to be consolidation as well. The language should not become irrelevant to youngsters when they leave education. It has to be transplanted into the workplace.

I make one slightly guarded comment. I speak as a past member of two quangos. I am not automatically impressed with the work of quangos. I do not in any way play down the appointment of the chairman today, but, from time to time, quangos make strange decisions. They do not always work in the most cost-effective way in pursuit of their aims.

I speak also with some sadness because I represent a part of the country which lost its language some years ago. A strong Celtic thread runs through Cornwall. There is a distinct culture, whether we talk about Methodism, rugby —most Cornishmen tell me that they taught it to the Welsh, probably not too well, judging by recent results —male voice choirs and brass bands. Two weekends ago we had a twinning in a village in my constituency. The charters were read out and signed in four languages— English, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. It took us slightly by surprise to hear the national anthem of Brittany because it was "Land of our Fathers".

The Celtic tongue is an ancient one: Welsh is an ancient language. If there had been a language Bill many centuries ago, we might be debating a vibrant Cornish language.

I support the Bill because it is important for a language to live, develop and be enhanced. The Minister said that the Welsh Language Act 1563 allowed Wales to have its own translation of the Bible and the Prayer Book. Sadly, Cornwall lost that battle in 1549. Will the Minister and his colleagues look afresh at the signatories to the European charter on minority languages which means a great deal to the Union? Some languages, such as Cornish, are struggling. Cornish does not have thousands of speakers, but people are interested in developing and enhancing it.

The line-by-line debate on the Bill will take place in Committee in a few weeks. Many issues transcend politics and perhaps in that light we can look at the use and enhancement of minority languages.

8.50 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): It is a pleasure to follow the dignified and positive speech by the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) about our language and the Bill. Throughout this four-hour debate there has been wide consensus, certainly among the Opposition parties, and sometimes it embraced some Conservative Members who would support a much stronger Bill. We welcome the Bill and look forward to debate in Committee where I hope that the Government will allow us to strengthen it. The Labour party and other parties will table amendments to try to increase the Bill's powers.

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

I shall summarise five or six areas in which there is wide consensus. First, the principle of equality between Welsh and English must be enshrined in the Bill's first clause. The Government have argued that that is implicit in the Bill, but it needs to be stated loudly and clearly that Welsh and English are equal in the public life and administration of Wales. I would accept a small amendment to the effect that that will be the case where reasonably practicable, because in Gwent and Clwyd and perhaps in Brecon and Radnor and Powys the language has a different status from that which it enjoys in Dyfed and Gwynedd.

My second point is about the extension of the Bill's powers to private utilities, because, as it stands, the Bill applies only to public bodies. Welsh Water, Wales Gas, British Telecom, South Wales Electricity and Manweb deal with every consumer in Britain. There are several other major organisations and I should like to see a schedule covering those. It could not apply to every corner shop, but it should apply widely and cover the clearing banks in Wales, and Boots, Dixons and supermarkets such as Sainsburys and Tesco. I could list 50 or 100 large private bodies to which the legislation should apply.

Clause 20 gives Crown immunity to Government Departments and there was a move in the other place to delete that clause. I cannot understand why those Departments should be treated any differently from local authorities. When my constituents write to me in Welsh they will expect an answer in Welsh and it is elementary courtesy so to reply. The same applies to the Welsh Office and its various departments. If equality means anything, it must apply to all letters from Government Departments.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) spoke professionally and graphically about Welsh-speaking juries. Given his professional background as a solicitor working in Gwynedd in a strong Welsh-speaking area, he knows about nuances. Many people in Dyfed and Gwynedd are much more fluent in Welsh than in English. They feel much more at home and give better-quality evidence, and the nuances in their evidence are important. Despite the best translation facilities, English-speaking members of juries will not pick up those nuances. It enhances the quality of our justice to allow Welsh speakers to give their evidence in Welsh and to try Welsh speakers before Welsh-speaking juries.

I had a niggling doubt about whether a jury would be biased by such selection, but when I read the speech by Gareth Williams, Lord Williams of Mostyn, in the other place on Welsh-speaking juries, that doubt was removed. If it is good enough for the noble Lord with his distinguished background, it is good enough for me. For reasons of status and equality, the Bill must give a right to have Welsh-speaking juries.

The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne said that he had an inherent suspicion about the way that quangos work. The Welsh Language Board will be a quango. We may have some reservations about the announcement of its chairman, but we congratulate him. He is a worthy ex-Member of Parliament, he has great ability and citizenship and he is committed to the language. However, we have deep disaffection with the whole idea of quangos. We look forward to the day when there is a Welsh assembly in Cardiff.

Mr. Wigley: A Parliament.

Mr. Williams: Why not; let us call it a Parliament. It could have a department to safeguard the language and introduce new laws on it passed by elected members in Wales. The present constitution of the board is arbitrary and gives far too much power of patronage to the Secretary of State. It has a chairman and 15 members, but there is no detailed representation. Those 15 members—if that is to be the number—should be representative of individual organisations in Wales, whether they are dealing with education, local authorities, women's institutes—Merched Y Wawr—or nursery education. The board should reflect the regional diversity of Wales and should include non-Welsh speakers and Welsh learners. That part of the Bill must be considered in more detail.

No hon. Member has referred to the mandamus provision: that the Secretary of State can take action if a defiant local authority or public body refuses to produce a Welsh language scheme for the board. The board cannot institute legal proceedings against a disaffected or dissident public body, and that substantially weakens the powers of the board. I understand that the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Race Relations Board can initiate proceedings. We shall seek in Committee to provide an equal power for the Welsh Language Board.

I have two reservations about the Bill. Several references have been made to Welsh-medium education and to its great success throughout Wales, particularly in the anglicised areas of Wales where previously no Welsh-medium education existed. Hon. Members have been lobbied by several organisations during the past few years. They have suggested that the Bill should include a clause that gives Welsh-medium education as of right to all children between the ages of three and 16. I support that suggestion. There should be a right in Cardiff, Swansea, Clwyd and Gwent, as well as in Dyfed and Gwynedd, to Welsh-medium education, wherever that is reasonably practicable and wherever it can be provided within a reasonable distance of home, transport being free of charge.

We must, however, be even handed. An absolutely equivalent right to English-medium education must be provided for those parents who choose that medium for their children. There cannot be one set of rights for one group of people without exactly equivalent rights being granted to everyone else. That is not, however, the case in some parts of Wales.

A complaints body ought to be set up alongside the Welsh Language Board. It is not enough for the board to have a complaints procedure. A separate complaints body should be set up. It could be the ombudsman. There could even be the establishment of a Welsh language ombudsman. I notice that, in its briefing to Members, the Welsh Consumer Council referred to the need for a separate complaints body. Alternatively, there could be a tribunal. I understand that the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Race Relations Board have a tribunal procedure.

The complaints mechanism would have to work both ways. It would have to apply both to a recalcitrant public body—a body that was not implementing a Welsh language scheme—and, conversely, to a public body that was too enthusiastic about the use of the Welsh language. In that case, there could be employment implications.

The Bill is far too weak. It needs to be greatly strengthened. Those who should strengthen it ought to be those Members of Parliament with Welsh constituencies.

There have been interesting and valuable contributions to the debate from Members of Parliament with constituencies across the border, but legislation that affects Wales should be dealt with by Welsh Members of Parliament. The Secretary of State for Wales referred to the need for consensus. The only way to achieve consensus is to refer the Bill to the full Welsh Grand Committee.

9.3 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Like all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I welcome the opportunity to speak about the Welsh Language Bill. It has been a long time in gestation. It is a great pity that, during that gestation period, we did not get something more like the Welsh Language Bill that has been proposed by the Welsh Language Board, some of whose members have sat patiently throughout the debate in the Strangers' Gallery.

That gives me the opportunity to recognise the contribution of one of my constituents, not just for creating a consensus in Wales but for taking forward positively the use of the Welsh language in Wales, not only as the chairman of the Welsh Language Board but as the chairman of Welsh Water. I am pleased to be able to say those words. We have had many differences about the way in which Welsh Water runs a number of its activities—particularly in relation to its supply to customers and the charges it makes—but I cannot fault him for the way in which Welsh Water has supported the Welsh language, and the way in which he, as chairman of the Welsh Language Board, has strengthened the possibility of improving the status of the Welsh language beyond what is now in the Bill. I am, of course, referring to Mr. John Elfed Jones.

The issue of equal validity has been mentioned by a number of hon. Members. It seems to me that what is in the Bill at the moment does not really go beyond what the Hughes Parry committee recommended in October 1965. I have to confess that I have not read all of the proceedings in the Lords, but I did, with the help of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), dip into them. On 9 January, Earl Ferrers said that the Bill would be

"confirming the official status of the Welsh language across the public sector as a whole."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 19 January 1993; Vol. 541, c. 834.]

It seems to me that it is but a short step to confirm the official status of the Welsh language in Wales.

Mention was made in the Lords debate of some technical legal difficulties, but I hope that either the Opposition can come up with a form of words that the Welsh Office and Government will accept or the Government will put to work the very powerful legal brains in the Welsh Office and other Departments and come up with another form of words to confirm the official status of the Welsh language, not only in the public sector but in all sectors in Wales.

It is good that the Welsh Language Board will be a statutory body, although I have reservations about the creation of yet another quango for the appointment of whose members the Secretary of State will have total responsibility. I hope that in Committee we shall look at ways of enabling a public consultation to take place—perhaps through the Welsh Affairs Select Committee—about people who can represent all walks of life in Wales on this public body.

One thing that worried me in the opening speech of the Secretary of State was his reference to the educational role of the Welsh Language Board. It seems to me that, in a way, it would undermine some aspects of the work of the Welsh Joint Education Committee, which is very closely connected with the democratic processes in Wales. The Welsh Language Board will not be. If the Welsh Language Board is to fulfil a function in education, it will need specialist sub-committees, for which, according to my reading of the Bill—and I have read the whole of it—there is no provision. Perhaps the Minister of State will be able to point out such a provision.

The Welsh Language Board, in this educational role, could cut across the Curriculum Council for Wales and the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales which will be set up. There would need to be some very clear definitions of the Welsh Language Board's responsibilities in its educational role.

As has already been pointed out, whatever else the Bill or the Welsh Language Board may do, the fundamentally important area is the development of bilingual education. The Bill says nothing about that; perhaps we should not expect it to. The Minister should make a statement about the ways in which Welsh bilingual education will be further promoted. In my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) there is great demand for a bilingual secondary school. Mid Glamorgan would dearly love to provide that school, but, with the threat of capping and other problems, it is not able to reserve the capital allocations for that purpose. The Welsh Office has a role to play in providing extra funding to ensure that bilingual education is provided.

Under the heading:

"Financial effects of the Bill"

the Government go out of their way to stress that there will be

"no overall increase in public expenditure . . . but where there are additional costs these will be accommodated within mainstream budgets."

Under the Act that established the Development Board for Rural Wales, there is provision for funding for Welsh publications and work. This year, a number of organisations applied, but almost as many as received money did not receive any, including Cyffeillion Y Ddaear Cymru—Friends of the Earth Wales—which has its headquarters in my constituency. It produces a large number of publications in the Welsh language on important environmental issues.

There is a case for money and I sincerely hope that in Committee it will become apparent that the Government are prepared to provide it.

9.11 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): We have listened to excellent speeches and I am pleased that all hon. Members who wished to speak have been able to do so.

For longer than most of us can remember, there has been a great deal of striving to reach the consensus to which the Secretary of State referred on the encouragement and improvement of the status of the Welsh language. It has taken more than 400 years to right the wrongs of Henry VIII's legislation which established English as the only official language in Wales. The Welsh language lost its official status not through neglect or misuse, but by Act of Parliament, and only by an Act of Parliament can it be restored.

[Mr. John Morris]

The main thrust of the concern of many in both this House and another place is whether the Bill gives the Welsh language a proper legal status, of necessity by another Act of Parliament. It does a great deal, but not enough, Dim da, lle gellirgwell—"Not good where you can get better", as I am obliged to translate.

I welcome the Bill and I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for introducing it. He may well have delivered his swan song this evening in his present capacity. I pay a special tribute to the Minister of State for his considerable efforts over the years. I also pay tribute to Lord Prys-Davies and the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who both played important roles in providing legislative paving stones. Last but not least—I am not the only one tonight to sing his praises, so his ears must be burning—I pay tribute to John Elfed Jones, the distinguished chairman of the Welsh Language Board.

The first stepping stone towards correcting history was the Welsh Courts Act, introduced when this country was fighting for its very life in 1942. Much later, as a young Member of Parliament, I was asked to prepare a report for the Welsh parliamentary party on the status of the Welsh language. A multi-party delegation of us went to see the then Minister for Welsh Affairs, Sir Keith Joseph, and we suggested the name of David Hughes Parry to chair the committee. The fact that the Minister accepted our recommendation illustrates the bipartisan nature of the approach.

The honour of introducing the Welsh Language Act 1967 fell to my noble Friend Lord Cledwyn. No one should underestimate the difficulties of getting a place in the legislative timetable—an obstacle course that the present Secretary of State has had to surmount. I, for one, fully realise that. I was introducing a Bill a year for Wales, so I know the problems and I congratulate the Secretary of State. Anyone who has been to the Cabinet Committee in July and dealt with such matters knows how difficult it is. It is equally difficult to explain complicated legislative concepts to hard-bitten parliamentary draftsmen. "Da was, da a ffyddlawn"—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"; that is for the benefit of another Welsh Presbyterian.

We should not over-estimate the importance of the Bill. Its main purpose is to provide a framework for the exercise of choice. Legislation will not cause the Welsh language to flourish. Only more and more Welsh people using it will do that. The Bill will, however, remove inhibitions and will provide and facilitate the opportunity and machinery for its use. It will improve the conditions of normality, so that no one will regard the use of Welsh as odd. When improved, the Bill can restore the language to its proper legal status, as the native official language of the country.

I was a junior Minister of Transport as long ago as 1966 to 1968 and, during that period, the Welsh Office was encouraging greater use of Welsh in formal documents. Even then, every licence application form had to be fought for. Looking back, the counter-arguments now seem bordering on fantasy. A bilingual driving licence application form would be too large physically. That was just one major objection to it. How far have we come in 25 years?

Important as the Bill is, of equal—some might say greater—importance is section 21 of the Education Act 1980, which ensures proper provision for costs of Welsh language education. The Government inherited, and honoured, the agreements that I had reached with the Treasury, announced at the Cardiff Eisteddfod to less than universal acclaim in 1978. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his kind remarks. When I went to Caernarfon at Easter 1974 and asked the local education authority what was the extra cost of bilingual education, it was evident that the question had not been previously addressed in that way. My officials mumbled the phrase that it was covered by the rate support grant. After considerable time, the evidence was forthcoming, the Treasury could then be bearded and we introduced a measure which was subsequently adopted, to my total gratitude, by the Conservative Government.

The most encouraging news, of which the Secretary of State has reminded us, is the increase in the ability of the young to speak Welsh, qualified by the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). It has been all due to the resolve of parents and the work of local education authorities, despite difficulties over resources. It is all very well for the Secretary of State to say that it is a matter for the local education authorities to decide their priorities, but if they have to operate within a ceiling, it is exceedingly difficult to provide for all the necessary good things. If the ceiling is raised, if resources are made available, local authorities' tasks will be that much easier.

I return to the more immediate problems identified in the course of the helpful discussions on the Bill in another place and tonight. First, there is the status of the language. The Bill does not provide for statutory bilingualism. It provides that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality.

I am not sure what those words mean. I have never come across them before. I am sure that they are sanctified by the Government's legal advisers. However, as we were reminded, on the European Communities (Amendment) Bill the legal advisers of the Foreign Office and the Attorney-General had differing views. I do not know whether the Attorney-General has been consulted on this matter—I suspect not. Government Departments are loth to consult the Attorney-General. At least, that was my experience, much as I desired his advice from time to time.

I share the disappointment in Wales that a better formula has not so far been found to give to the language its proper status. If we came to the situation anew, with a blank sheet of paper, with no history, what is proposed in the Bill might be enough—but the perception of justice is as important as justice itself. Despite the assurances in another place that Welsh is an official language, that it was not the intention to establish Welsh as an official language in the Bill because the Bill reflects the Government's belief that it already is, I am sorry to say that it is not seen as such because, frankly, it is not. Recent history has shown that an extension of the right to use the Welsh language has had to be proved. The reality is that it is not seen as a right.

The Bill goes a long way, but not far enough. The Government must find a formula once and for all to kill off that perception of inequality. I have studied closely every word that has been said in another place. As I understand it, the Government do not lack the will—the problem is to find the legal means to achieve it.

I listened carefully to the tenor of the Secretary of State's sympathetic remarks tonight. Three sets of

amendments were moved in another place, including the occasionally used purpose clause and the ingenious amendment of the noble Lord Hooson. The objections put up would have done credit to the windmills of Don Quixote. I assure the House that no one wants *Hansard* translated into Welsh. That was one of the objections put in another place.

I invite the Government to try again because, as has been said, they have the means and the powerful body of parliamentary draftsmen to find a formula. Otherwise, the subject will be returned to time after time in a legislative effort to correct the situation. It would be a running sore and the credit that the Government deserve for introducing the Bill would be substantially dissipated.

I come now to the second issue. I welcome the setting up of a statutory board. The fact that the board is statutory means—obviously, perhaps—that it has legal duties and obligations which are—obviously, again—spelt out in legislation. Having set up the Welsh Development Agency, I was determined, despite the considerable lack of enthusiasm inside and outside the Welsh Office, that Mid Wales Development should also be a statutory board and, in the same way, with even more opposition, the Land Authority for Wales—all three of which, I am pleased to say, have survived the ravages of 13 years of Conservative Government.

The board must attract members of high calibre to reflect Welsh-speaking and non-Welsh-speaking Wales, those learning and those who have been described—I had not thought of them in this way—as having had some of the language but have seen it depreciate over the years. That fourth group is clearly important.

The chairman has a key role to play, and I wish Lord Elis-Thomas well in his new appointment. He has a great responsibility to act fairly and properly for the language. Many of the board's problems will be concentrated in non-Welsh-speaking Wales—contrary to those who thought that there might be more in Welsh-speaking Wales. I say that after having thought about it a great deal, as I am sure the Secretary of State has.

The board, and the chairman in particular, will be dealing with public bodies, especially local authorities. As a political animal, the Secretary of State will know the composition of all of them. The chairman, in particular, will have to to tread like Agag—I stress that for the benefit of my Presbyterian friend—to ensure that he acts diplomatically and achieves the best results.

There has been criticism of the lack of an independent element on the board. There is a fear, which to judge from experience is justified, that the Government may pack the board with safe, acceptable placemen. The Secretary of State must guard against that. There is also a fear that it will lack democratic accountability.

As so many elected local and public authorities will be involved, may I suggest and commend a formula, whether it be written into the Bill or not? When I set up the Land Authority for Wales in the face of bitter opposition from local government, it was necessary to carry local government with us. In order to constitute part of the membership, we invited the two major local government organisations in Wales—one representing the counties and one the districts—to put up between them four members, of which the Secretary of State would choose two, one from each. That system may still be operating. It certainly did not diminish the Secretary of State's responsibility or circumscribe it unduly.

Although the two were there as members of the authority, there was some accountability. If there had not been, they might not have been renominated the next time by their constituent organisations. I commend that suggestion to the Secretary of State and hope that he will act on an even wider basis than I felt necessary in the perhaps narrower sphere that I have just described.

There is perhaps an even more respectable precedent than mine. As I understand it, a non-conformist Prime Minister, now Lord Callaghan, declined to take full responsibility for appointing bishops. The practice was for two names to be put forward by the Synod, from which he chose one. That is even more respectable than my system.

The bottom line is that the board must have the public's confidence. It has important tasks to perform and must carry public opinion with it. It must not behave outrageously but, if it does, it can be replaced by the Secretary of State in due course. I am especially pleased that the board will advise the Secretary of State on matters affecting the Welsh language and that it will have a promotional role. That will be a very important part of its function. I felt naked at the Welsh Office, not having such a body to advise me on the spending of public money in that sphere.

My advisers at the Welsh Office might have had great experience in health or education, but in this respect it was very limited. Perhaps I may disclose the fact that, soon after going to the Welsh Office, I discovered that my principal adviser, the assistant secretary, did not claim to speak Welsh. It was a bit of a shock, but the situation was corrected fairly soon.

There is a need for such a body to give advice. The Secretary of State mentioned the Eisteddfod. I took a decision on my own initiative, and I was fortunate in persuading the Prime Minister of the day—Lord Wilson, as he now is—while he was coming round the Devil's Bridge falls with me, that what I recommended was the proper thing to do. There is no better place to secure the agreement of the Prime Minister of the day than when one is taking him round the Devil's Bridge falls at a fast pace. I recommend that method to the Secretary of State.

The same happened with Ysgolion Meithrin Cymraeg —the Welsh nursery schools. I was worried at the time about whether either body would accept the offer, but the role is an important one, and I hope that it will provide a valuable service for the Secretary of State.

The key to the working of the Bill will be the draft guidelines to be issued by the board after approval by the Secretary of State and by Parliament, and the form of the schemes to be approved by the House in due course. I would fault the Secretary of State here, because I wish that either he or those who spoke on his behalf in another place had set out in more detail what they had in mind for the draft guidelines, and especially what kind of schemes they intended to recommend to the House.

Another matter of concern is the extension of the board's remit to the privatised concerns. As publicly-owned industry becomes more limited, or some of its functions diminish, the role of the board will necessarily diminish. The privatised concerns are monopolies. Some may not be, but one cannot buy water elsewhere from another source and, apart from a few specialist consumers, one cannot buy gas and electricity elsewhere either. Privatised concerns are public organisations, yet if, as my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) said, some of the functions of other public organisations are

[Mr. John Morris]

privatised, as with Group 4 or other such companies, even though they will still be part of the public service that runs the prisons, if there is a franchise I doubt whether they will be covered.

I lack the confidence that the hon. Member for Caernarfon had in clause 6(1)(o). The Minister of State made it clear that the test would be whether a body was funded from Government sources, so if a franchise were given it would seem that the body was no longer funded by Her Majesty's Government and would therefore be outwith the provisions of the clause. We shall return to the matter in due course, because we feel strongly that whether publicly-owned industries remain public or become private, they are still a vital part of the economy and the life of Wales.

Not the least important issue, but one to which a great deal of symbolism is attached, is the right to trial by jury in Welsh. The argument has been advanced that that right would breach the principle of the random choosing of juries. However, it is only fairly recently that juries have been chosen from among all adults in the country. Until the beginning of this century juries had to be male, and there was a property qualification until fairly recently. In security cases the Attorney-General can override the choice of juries. So that argument cannot stand a proper test. Furthermore, cases can be, and frequently are, moved to other parts of the country where there will be a bigger pool.

The real mischief with which we have to deal is the perception of unfairness which arises from the fact that one can be tried in Welsh in a magistrates court but not if the case is sent for trial to a Crown court. No answer was given to that problem in another place. Translation, however good, however improved it may be, can never be as satisfactory. Juries judge witnesses by their demeanour, their nuances and their reflexes. It is my professional experience that a translation is never as good as the real thing.

My next concern is the interface with the race relations and equal opportunities legislation. An amendment was proposed in the other place which, with some refinement, met with the approval of the Race Relations Board. It was a shock to many of us that there has been litigation on those issues in the past few years. When the legislation was conceived, whether I was a Minister or a Back Bencher —I think that I was a Minister both times—it was never thought that the issues of race and equality of opportunity would impinge on the Welsh language. It is a novel concept that there was a right of action arising from those matters.

A great deal of concern was expressed in another place that the Bill will not bind other Government Departments. In view of the statements made there, and those of the Secretary of State tonight, I do not share all of the doubts about this matter. Obviously, one Secretary of State cannot be superior to another one—it goes right across the whole concept of a Secretary of State. The Committee may want to return to that matter and perhaps argue why the Race Relations Board can take another Minister to court whereas the Welsh Language Board will not. However, I do not share the apprehension that has been expressed.

Hon. Members have listened patiently all day, especially to my speech, and I am grateful to them. We have come a long way socially and legally since Tudor times. I have a little recollection of my grandfather, who went to school between 1875 and 1882—he went for only seven years because he left at the age of 12 and went down the pit at 13. He told me about the "Welsh not". Although historians argue about this, about 1861 when teachers were paid by results—history seems to be repeating itself in part—Welsh children were tested on English reading, English writing and arithmetic, but no allowance was made for the fact that they came from Welsh-speaking homes. The "Welsh not" was put around a child's neck if he or she spoke Welsh in the playground or anywhere else and it had to be worn until it was passed on. We have come a long way since then. I welcome the Bill. Once it is improved in Committee, it will be important and I thank the Government for introducing it.

9.36 pm

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): It is clear that there is no real opposition in the House to the Bill—there has been criticism, but not outright opposition. I am grateful to all parties for their forbearance. I particularly welcome all the supportive speeches that we have heard, including that of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) with all his experience as a former Secretary of State. I also give special thanks to English Members from over the border for their supportive speeches—my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) and for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe).

I assure all hon. Members who have spoken that we shall consider their views carefully at all stages of the Bill, as we have considered, and are still considering, the views nobly expressed in another place and those that are still coming from Wales. If we can improve the Bill by amendment or new clauses, we shall endeavour to do so, but first we must be convinced that whatever change is proposed is genuinely for the betterment of the Bill and those who are likely to be affected by it. Hon. Members will expect no softer proviso than the one I have just given.

We are legislating in a highly sensitive area in which I believe—the more I hear—it is easier to make mistakes than be right. Therefore, hon. Members will understand our cautionary approach. I assure the House that that is dictated not by stubbornness but by sensitivity.

At this point, I pay tribute to the considerable thought and work that has been put into the Bill by not only the Welsh Language Board and the Welsh Office but other Departments of State, my colleagues in the Government and their officials, all of whom, without exception, have tried to be as helpful as possible during the months in which the Bill has been prepared.

The House will recognise that the Bill is an important element in the Government's wider policy of support for the Welsh language, which is now accepted as part of Britain's heritage. That policy of support has found expression in many forms in the past 14 years, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded the House at the beginning of the debate. That policy has certainly inspired confidence in the future of the language and inspired those who work for it to ever greater endeavour and achievement.

Our policy is aimed at supporting the language wherever it is spoken. It is a policy for the whole of Wales and all the people of Wales. I assure my hon. Friend the

Member for Monmouth (Mr. Evans) of our continuing sensitivity to different parts of Wales and, indeed, the flexibility that is possible within the Bill so that different parts of Wales can be given different treatment.

I advise those who criticise the Bill for being weak, inadequate or a paper tiger—as the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) called it—to consider its scope. It will, after all, extend to every branch of public sector service in Wales. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has reiterated today that that will include Government Departments and their agencies. To all intents and purposes, therefore, it will be as if a formal duty were placed on such organisations.

Welsh-speaking consumers will be consulted during the preparation of schemes. Schemes to be submitted to the board will have to contain proposals for giving effect to the principle of equality as set out in the Bill, as well as a timetable according to which they will be implemented.

The general policy for the introduction of schemes is intended to be flexible but comprehensive. The task of introducing schemes throughout the public sector will, by anyone's definition, be a major undertaking. The board will therefore need to consider the rate at which it believes that it can introduce schemes and those parts of the public sector to which it will accord particular priority. There will therefore need to be a phased introduction of schemes, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made it clear that he would expect priority to be given to schemes introduced by the major public sector employers in Wales. That will, of course, include Government Departments and their agencies.

I believe that we can leave it to the board to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in introducing schemes. The board will be able to judge the timetable that is appropriate, according to the particular circumstances of each body. It is important that schemes are in place as quickly as possible, but it is just as important that they should be schemes that can last. The machinery that we propose needs to be considered with that thought in mind.

The legislation will achieve nothing if it serves only to promote short-term measures that bring about temporary alleviation for Welsh speakers. If public sector organisations are to make a lasting contribution to the establishment of an environment in which the Welsh language can prosper, schemes must be devised that will stand the test of time. Schemes must therefore be able to change as the expectations of Welsh speakers change. The Bill provides for that. Individual schemes can be amended, where appropriate, so can the board's guidelines. Therefore, not only is the Bill intended to have an impact right across the public sector, but its effects will be lasting. We are setting the board a serious challenge, to which I am sure that it will be anxious to respond.

It is clear that clause 6(1)(o) will attract a great deal of interest. The type of body that will meet the test contained in that subsection is one that, in the first place, appears to the Secretary of State to be exercising functions of a public nature. We have been advised that a body that is funded by the Government—for example, the training and enterprise councils—may satisfy the test, if it falls within the definition contained in the subsection.

Mr. Hain: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: May I leave the matter to the Committee?

References have been made to the official status of the language. The Government believe that Welsh already has such a status. Anyone who doubts that statement has only to look at the way in which public business is conducted in Wales today and, indeed, has been conducted for many years. Welsh plays a prominent role in our public administration and special provision has been made for it in Acts passed by this Parliament. By establishing the principle of equality, the Bill reaffirms that official status.

Crucially, the Bill recognises that status alone is not enough. Declarations of status do not in themselves address the practical obstacles that can stand in the way of services being made available in Welsh. The Bill does not, therefore, establish the principle of equality in isolation; it provides for those obstacles to be overcome. The challenge facing the Welsh Language Board will be to assist public bodies in finding innovative ways in which such obstacles can, wherever possible, be overcome.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: If I may, I do not want to give way. I want to express some views on the tremendous variety of subjects that have been raised in the debate.

Reference has been made to other principles, including the principle of equal validity. The principle behind the Bill is that of equality as expressed in the phrase "on a basis of equality".

A variety of wide-ranging declarations of principle has been suggested in the debate, and I am concerned that they would introduce uncertainty into the Bill's provisions. That could only be resolved by recourse to the courts. It would not further the cause of the language to turn it into a legal battlefield. I, for one, do not want our language to be murdered with legal niceties by sharp-faced lawyers. *[Interruption.]* I exclude the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon from that category. That would do nothing to promote an environment where the language has the support of all parts of the community. It would be one way in which the good will that currently exists towards the language could easily be dissipated.

The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) referred to the need for statutory rights for Welsh speakers. The problem with statutory rights is that they depend on the courts for their enforcement. In my view, what the majority of Welsh speakers want is not the right to go to court to demand a better service but a better service as such. The Bill concentrates on those practical issues to ensure that better service is provided.

The Bill provides for an efficient and effective means of resolving disputes without requiring individuals to employ a lawyer. We do not believe that it is sensible to require individuals to enforce their rights simply in order to receive a service in Welsh. We believe that the needs of Welsh speakers are better served by placing obligations on public authorities. The Welsh Language Board has shown in its work to date that it can use its good offices to find solutions to the practical problems facing Welsh speakers. Backed up by the Secretary of State's power of direction, that will happen even more in future.

A number of hon. Members have referred to education. They include the hon. Members for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that education would remain at the heart of our policy of support for the language. It might be helpful if I say a little

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

more about how it will be dealt with by the Bill, as suggested by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths).

Local education authorities will be required to include their proposals for the provision of Welsh-medium education in their schemes. A similar duty will be placed on any schools funding council for Wales which may be established in future. As is the case for other public services, local education authorities will have to take into account guidelines that the board will produce on the subject. The Bill requires that public organisations consult on the terms of their schemes and we shall expect local education authorities to consult parents. That process will not involve any change to the terms of the Education Acts under which the provision of Welsh-medium education has grown so encouragingly over the past few decades. The strength of those Acts is that they link the provision of education to the wishes of parents and to local circumstances more generally.

In line with the Bill's provisions, it would not be our intention to impose a rigid blueprint to which Welsh-medium education must conform. The linguistic character of Gwynedd is different from that of Gwent and we would expect the provision of Welsh-medium education in those two areas to reflect that. Welsh-medium provision will therefore continue to reflect local circumstances while ensuring that the reasonable wishes of parents are taken into account wherever possible.

In recent years, there has been an encouraging development in Welsh-medium education, particularly in the secondary sector, which we all welcome. I am anxious that we should build on good practice and extend that into further and higher education. The duty to prepare schemes will therefore extend to further and higher education colleges and their respective funding councils. I am sure that that will help to solve the problem of the school leavers who want to learn Welsh and carry on with their studies from school. It may, I hope, impact on the figures for those under 25 in the next census, if not before. Schemes will not impact on the position of Welsh in the national curriculum—that factor is already taken care of under separate legislation.

The board will assume the responsibility for taking a broad overview of the position of the Welsh language in the education system in Wales. In doing so, it will be important for the board to work alongside the other organisations working in that sector. That will certainly include the curriculum and assessment authority—which is to be known by its Welsh acronym, ACAC—but it will be equally important for the board to establish close working relationships with the further and higher education funding councils. The board will not remove from those organisations their own responsibility for the development of Welsh-medium education in their particular sector. I am sure that the education system in Wales will benefit from their close co-operation.

The issue of juries at trials conducted through the medium of Welsh is one which, I assure the House, has received long and careful consideration. However, the Government's view remains unchanged: we do not consider it appropriate to make provision to require juries at such trials to be composed solely of people who understand Welsh. I acknowledge the strength of feeling about this issue, but we simply cannot allow anything to interfere with the principle of random selection of juries or place further hurdles in the way of the administration of justice. I expect that I shall find it necessary to say more about that matter in Committee.

I am reinforced in my view by perhaps the most authoritative report ever produced on the position of the Welsh language in the courts. The House is no doubt aware that I am referring to the findings of the report by the late Lord Edmund Davies some 20 years ago for the then Lord Chancellor. None the less, I remind the House that the noble Lord concluded that the arguments in favour of the process of the fully random selection of juries exceeded the arguments in favour of stipulating a requirement for Welsh-speaking jurors. Lord Edmund Davies advised the use of simultaneous translation facilities as the best means of overcoming the practical difficulties associated with the former argument. Over the past 20 years, developments in the expertise and professionalism of translators have further reinforced the view that the best means of safeguarding the interests of Welsh speakers in court is by means of simultaneous translation.

I see the Bill as establishing a framework for public bodies to provide services through the medium of Welsh, on the basis of equality of status between the two languages—and equal respect. We are ensuring, through the Bill, that Parliament, whose will it will be that English and Welsh should be treated on the basis of equality in Wales, should have an important and continuing role to play in the implementation of the Bill.

When the board has been established, one of its first tasks will be to draw up guidelines—these have been referred to in the debate—as to the form and content of the schemes to be prepared by public bodies under clauses 9 and 10. Those guidelines will be subject to the approval of both Houses of Parliament, as, indeed, will any revision of them in the future. The board's annual report will also be laid before Parliament, as provided for in schedule 1. I must tell the hon. Member for Cardiff, West that this House has not finished with the Welsh language. The guidelines will come before us in due course. The Bill therefore assumes Parliament's continuing interest in the Welsh language, and there is scope for that interest to be expressed on the Floor of the House and in another place. I regard that as of the utmost importance and in tune with the best traditions of Parliament. After all, it was Parliament which, by statute in 1563, required that there should be a Welsh translation of the Bible. That was a very significant event.

There are those who believe that the Bill does not go far enough. I believe that it is about right, and I ask hon. Members to give it a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

WELSH LANGUAGE BILL *[Lords]* *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Welsh Language Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure attributable to the Act incurred by the Secretary of State, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

NUCLEAR POWER STATIONS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 11096/92, relating to the efficiency and safety of nuclear power stations in certain non-member countries; and agrees that it would be wholly appropriate to amend Decision 77/270/Euratom to authorise the commission to contract Eurotom borrowings in order to contribute to the financing required for improving the degree of efficiency and safety of nuclear power stations in certain non-member countries.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

COURTS (JURISDICTION)

That the draft High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 1993, which was laid before this House on 21st April, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

Question agreed to.

Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert G. Hughes.]*

10 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): The reason I have asked for the debate is that the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993 was passed earlier this year by both Houses of Parliament to amend the law affecting the supply of gas, yet it has not been implemented, because the Health and Safety Executive has so far declined to draw up a new regulation to cover the new circumstances. Its failure to do so, and its unwillingness to show any intention of doing so in the near future, is in my view a breach of its obligations. Rather worse, its attitude strikes me as treating the will of Parliament with contempt.

The Act was the brainchild of my noble Friend Lord Cochrane of Cults. It was his creation. He started it as a private Member's Bill in another place and, after its completion there, asked me to pilot it through this House. It passed its remaining stages here in January, and promptly gained Royal Assent.

In a nutshell, the Act tidies up the labyrinthine series of regulations governing the supply of gas through pipes, and thereby makes it easier to supply gas from a propane storage tank to a series of proximate outlets such as caravans, chalets, self-contained housing estates, isolated communities or agricultural properties. It is a fairly simple deregulation exercise and, if only the HSE would realise it, a safety exercise as well. It is almost beyond belief that such a simple and straightforward amendment to the law should be subsequently thwarted by others.

In order to understand why a seemingly simple matter has become so bogged down, we need to take a few steps back. The origin of the problems which gave rise to the Act lies in the implementation of two earlier pieces of legislation, the Pipe-lines Act 1962 and the Gas Act 1986. Until the 1986 Act, there were three distinct gas markets in the United Kingdom: nationalised gas, industrial gas, and liquid petroleum gas. The 1986 Act granted British Gas a monopoly of the supply of gas throughout the United Kingdom. It allowed for competition, however, in that it permitted the regulator, Ofgas, to grant section 8 authorisations to other suppliers who succeeded in passing the stringent vetting procedures laid down by the Act.

The implication, though, of the 1986 Act was that any authorised competitor under section 8 was likely to be a substantial business supplying gas as its main commercial activity. The sort of parallel one might draw is that between Mercury and BT. The trouble was that most of the suppliers who suddenly found themselves subject to section 8 authorisation were small, even minute, enterprises in which the supply of gas was only a tiny incidental part of their business. They were hardly a threat to the commercial prosperity of British Gas, and certainly not the sort of supplier envisaged by those who drafted section 8 of the 1986 Act.

For historic reasons, most of them were found in the holiday park industry, the better parks having piped LPG into their caravans or chalets as part of improvement schemes for their customers. Those caravans, for instance, which have an individual bottle of gas for each unit are outside the scope of the 1986 Act and other legislation. At the same time as rigorously applying section 8 of the Gas Act 1986, Ofgas declared that these tiny piped LPG

[Mr. Alan Duncan]

systems were pipelines under the Pipe-lines Act 1962. This was clearly not the intention of that Act, as a list of its exemptions shows.

Accordingly, small suppliers, all of whom are almost irrelevant to the sort of massive supply undertaken by British Gas and its putative competitors, were set a most intricate paper chase, involving numerous public bodies and no end of forms and approvals, all of which were designed to govern sizeable supplies of gas to consumer or corporate users. The forms might work for one or two applications a year, but certainly not for a host of tiddly suppliers, most of whom were in remote areas and whose supply was quite specific. It is hardly surprising that a large backlog of unfinished applications built up.

Complaints were rife among all parts of the LPG market about the complexity of the authorisation system and the sheer inefficiency of Ofgas's administration. To be fair, Ofgas was not designed to oversee such a regime. A few cosmetic changes were made, but the problem remained. It was subsequently pointed out at a meeting at the Department of Energy that the section 8 authorisation procedures had reached such a state of collapse that the Secretary of State was in fact breaking the terms of section 4 of the 1986 Act under which he was obliged to ensure that all reasonable demands for gas should be met.

This is where my noble Friend Lord Cochrane leaped into the breach. Once it became clear that the Department of Energy would not oppose a private Member's Bill, if it were properly designed to put things right, he engaged the co-operation of the various interested parties to support the drafting of a suitable Bill. The Gas (Exempt Supplies) Bill had its Second Reading in another place on 8 July last year.

The 1993 Act had two purposes, both of which were welcomed by the DTI. The first, under section 8 of the Gas Act, was to exempt the supply of propane through a pipe, and the second was to allow the Secretary of State to make other exemptions by negative order. The purpose of the first exemption was simply to allow suppliers of piped propane to continue much as they had always done before Ofgas began to hound them. They were, after all, governed by an industry code.

The purpose of the second section of the Act was to allow the Secretary of State to grant exemptions to cover other supplies which do not fit well in the 1986 Act, such as by-product gases which would otherwise be caught by Ofgas. This reflects the corresponding provision in the Electricity Act 1989.

British Gas had a few qualms about the Bill. I think that it is fair to say that these were largely commercial, and largely unfounded. The sectors affected by the Bill were hardly those which were liable to undermine the competitive position of British Gas. The whole of the independent gas industry supported it—that is to say, the producers of propane, by-product gas, landfill gas and coal gas—and so did Ofgas, the DTI, individual consumers and the small suppliers who were struggling with the hydra-headed monster created by the 1986 Act.

The Bill was enthusiastically supported by the three main trade associations in LPG supply, the Liquid Petroleum Gas Association, the National Caravan Council and the British Home and Holiday Parks Association. Given the DTI's blessing for the whole idea of a private Member's Bill, the latter two paid all the legal costs in the belief they were working on a means of solving the problem. The culprit in all this, however, is the Health and Safety Executive.

Ever since its earliest days, the regulator, Ofgas, has been at odds with the HSE over the administration of the safety requirements of the 1986 Act as they affect section 8 authorisations. It appears that Ofgas did not really want to become involved, but the HSE refused to undertake the necessary safety regulations itself.

Legally, Ofgas deals only with the "supply of gas through pipes", but in practice this means that it deals with the regulation of any gas which is sold directly or indirectly to a user. Any gas which is not a supply in these terms, or in other words is a self-supply, is the responsibility of the HSE, and always has been. This division into supply and self-supply under overlapping rules has been, and remains, a matter of great confusion to those involved.

Once exemption under the Act begins, this problem will disappear, as only one code of practice—that of the HSE—will apply, and supply will be treated the same as self-supply. Curiously, though, the HSE opposes the change of rules for supply, even though this would bring it into line with self-supply where HSE rules already apply. I hope that the House is following me on this increasingly complicated matter. What are the reasons for its objections? Has it researched the compliance costs? Has it made a risk analysis? I do not think so.

After the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Bill was published, there was, inevitably, a large drop in the number of section 8 applications, in expectation of the sensible regime to come. Indeed, the Ofgas report for 1992 even welcomed the Bill, and since its passing Ofgas—while acting quite legally—has been totally passive in this field, dealing only with a trickle of applications.

For this Act to be implemented, a commencement order has to be issued by the Secretary of State under section 4(2), but in practice I believe that the Minister is reluctant to issue a commencement order until the HSE has published its revised regulations for gas installation and use. Despite a ministerial assurance in another place that it might be ready by now, the latest indication is that the HSE has no intention of having these regulations ready before the middle of 1994. What can they possibly be waiting for?

Without a commencement order, the industry is in limbo, and what is more—this causes me great concern—the unauthorised supply of gas is a criminal offence on its own, even if no change is involved. To supply gas dangerously is a different offence. The Secretary of State has the power to make the necessary orders, yet it is hard to see a rational justification for not doing so when, for LPG self-supply, there is already an accepted set of regulations—which are deemed unsuitable for supply—considering that it is the terms or purpose of the delivery of gas which define which category is involved.

I cannot see what the HSE is waiting for, but as soon as the DTI takes steps to try to implement the Act, the cry of "safety" goes up from the HSE, and the commencement of the Act is further delayed. It is simply not true to say that, when we passed this Act, we all knew we would have to wait thereafter on the HSE to get its house in order. We were led to believe at the time that the HSE would actually accept a voluntary call-out code for exempt supplies. I feel that the Minister should hold it to that understanding.

Piped gas is actually safer than having to place a cylinder beside every unit, because the fire loading is less. So what magic ingredient can the HSE possibly be about to put into new regulations which will make the supply of propane safer? Is it reasonable to take over one year to draw up the rules? Is it reasonable to talk about the statutory need for emergency telephones and call-out procedures when these are already provided for under a voluntary code which is working well, and has been for many years?

My hon. Friend the Minister, in conjunction with my noble Friend Lord Cochrane of Cults, who worked tirelessly on the Bill, has been tremendously supportive of this Act. He has guided, steered, nudged and helped to amend it. He has done everything he can to help to implement it.

I intend no criticism of the Minister; indeed, I am at pains to commend his efforts to solve a problem that many would not have bothered to consider in such detail. However, to devotees of "Yes Minister", it seems that Sir Humphrey is working overtime. The current regime is in utter chaos, the law is in place to rectify the problem, but those responsible are doing nothing to put the solution into practice.

The Health and Safety Executive has been so dilatory that, owing to its failure to give a fair wind to the implementation of the Act, there is even a risk that existing suppliers of propane—for whom the 1993 Act is designed to create an exemption from needless bureaucracy—may actually be subject to criminal prosecution under the Gas Act 1986. That is absurd; in my view, it is itself criminal. No industry can flourish when it is over-regulated; no industry can even breathe when the various regulatory bodies are quarrelling with each other. That is especially true when so many of the regulations seem utterly pointless anyway.

The current state of affairs is a disgrace. This small Act has been passed by both Houses, yet an outside body is defying the will of Parliament to solve a problem that directly affects the welfare of suppliers and customers. Those who have failed to put the Act into practice are not only failing in their duty, but acting in a manner that should make them directly answerable to the House for their behaviour.

I assure the Minister that he would have the full support of the House were he to address the matter boldly and knock some heads together. Will he, assure me that no one will be prosecuted for the criminal offence of supplying gas before this muddle has been resolved? May I invite him to announce a date on which the Act will be implemented —and may I ask him to confirm, without equivocation, that the HSE will not be allowed to continue to thwart the will of Parliament, to the detriment of those who have a legitimate right to go about their lawful business?

10.16 pm

The Minister of Energy (Mr. Tim Eggar): Let me begin in the traditional way by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) on his success. He is probably unique in managing to put a Bill on to the statute book without saying a word, and then raising the same legislation on the Adjournment.

My hon. Friend kindly accorded some recognition to the role played by my Department and myself in the drafting of the Bill. Let me, in turn, pay tribute to both my hon. Friend and to my noble Friend Lord Cochrane. This is a relatively small but extremely important area of the law, and, as soon as I had the pleasure of meeting my noble Friend shortly after taking up my present post, it struck me that we should act as quickly as possible. I think it is fair to say that, together, the three of us have put the legislation on to the statute book.

As my noble Friend has pointed out, the purpose of the Act can be linked with our objective as a Government. It is deregulatory; and it increases competition in the gas market, albeit at the margin. I readily accept that the provisions of the original 1986 Act—particularly section 8 —have proved a burdensome procedure, given that small amounts of gas are going to a very limited market. We have been very much aware of the industry's concern about the cost and the burdens that it will incur in complying with the authorisation procedure.

I think that I can give my hon. Friend some good news, although perhaps not quite as much as he and our noble Friend might wish.

The main purpose of section 8, and the provisions in earlier legislation on which it was based, was to control entry into the piped gas supply market. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, that applies in particular to caravan sites and holiday parks. It was almost by mistake that the small-scale systems have attracted the same degree of control as the much larger systems for which section 8 was designed. Those small businesses, as they mainly are, were not attempting to set themselves up as gas suppliers; the supply of gas was incidental to their main business. At the same time, as I am sure my hon. Friend recognises, all gas supplies, including LPG, are potentially hazardous, and it is right that the safety regime under which LPG is supplied is rigorous and enforceable and inspires public confidence.

In its 1990 annual report, Ofgas noted that concern had been expressed by the interested parties about section 8. As a result, it began an internal review of the section 8 procedures. Once the review had been completed, Ofgas immediately took action to implement the various administrative changes, which did much to streamline the then existing procedures. My hon. Friend fairly paid tribute to Ofgas for that.

However, those changes did not resolve all the problems. Ofgas and my noble Friend Lord Cochrane drew our attention to the legislative changes needed to make matters easier. In particular, in 1991 Ofgas drew our attention to the overlap of safety responsibilities between it and the HSE. The then Department of Energy studied its recommendations and concluded that they were sensible. It was largely as a result of that that we supported the Bill, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton piloted through the House.

I recognise—indeed, I share—my hon. Friend's frustration that the Act has not been brought into effect. During the Act's passage through the other House, the Government gave two assurances. The first was that in deregulating this aspect of the gas market there would be no diminution in safety standards. The second was that the Act would not come into force until the Health and Safety Executive had had sufficient time to put alternative arrangements in place.

I think it fair to point out to my hon. Friend that the Act was supported by the Government on that basis. However, it is also fair for him and for our noble Friend

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

to point out that, at that time, it was expected that the HSE would come forward with those regulations in a rather more timely way than has been the case.

My hon. Friend is aware that the HSE answers to the Health and Safety Commission, which is an independent body. The commission has not declined to bring forward regulations, but it has been conducting a wide-ranging review of gas safety, including the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1984. At the urging of my Department, among others, that review has rightly taken account of the need to avoid adding any unnecessary burdens on industry. My officials and other interested parties have urged the HSC to press ahead with this important task.

I understand that the review has been completed and that the HSC will be considering proposals for revised regulations on 22 June. Those regulations have important implications for public safety, and the HSE must therefore allow adequate time for consultation. That is not a matter of choice; it is required to do under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. It hopes that the regulations can be put in place by June 1994. At that point, the Department intends to introduce an order bringing the Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act into force.

Safety, as I have said and as was made clear in the other place, is the key point. Section 8 authorisations include two important safety requirements—the requirement that suppliers have the right of entry into the premises supplied, and the requirement of the provision of a 24-hour telephone and emergency response service. It is important that those are maintained, and that they are capable of being enforced, and we must do that if we are to uphold the assurances that the Government were given that, as a result of the Act, there will be no reduction in safety standards.

Those two requirements may appear to be relatively minor, but we must not forget that gas is a hazardous substance, and there needs to be an appropriate response available should an incident occur. It is sometimes claimed that, because the Act applies to low-pressure gas coming from large LPG tanks, the hazard is not so great. We can argue about whether that is the case in practice, because we have large LPG tanks that are inherently dangerous but, given the assurances that we gave to another place, I feel obliged to stick by those undertakings.

I recognise the immense frustration of my hon. Friend and my noble Friend, and the holiday parks industry, which has been behind, and supportive of, the Act. Therefore, we have tried to introduce some interim arrangements to cover the next 12 months to June 1994. We have sought to devise those interim arrangements while ensuring that we take the necessary measures to ensure that safety remains paramount. We have been through, as my hon. Friend knows, a number of alternative ways to meet the requirement to have easy interim arrangements and to meet our safety obligations. We have investigated the possibility of the class authorisation, but that was not acceptable to the HSE, which felt that it would not be enforceable.

My hon. Friend's suggestion that there was a breach in the terms of section 4 is not the case. Section 4 requires the Secretary of State to secure that a person who already has an authorisation does not refuse to supply a customer who can economically be supplied by the person. Therefore, the relevant provision has nothing to do with the procedures for granting authorisation. I can set his mind at rest on that.

I have some, although only a little, good news. Spurred on by the pressure of the debate, my Department has been considering with Ofgas how the existing regime can be administered in as light-handed a manner as possible over the next 12 months. I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend and all my other hon. Friends who have been good enough to stay tonight that we have, literally just, reached agreement in principle with Ofgas on some arrangements that have been designed to achieve further streamlining.

I had hoped to be able to lay out the full details of that to the House, but so fierce and detailed have been the discussions that I am not yet able to do so. I can say that work will be continuing over the forthcoming holiday period—at least, for my hon. Friends, it will be a holiday period—and I am confident that we shall be able to go some considerable way to enforcing regulations over the coming 12 months in a rather more light-handed way than had been anticipated.

The HSE is independent. Under the terms of the Act, Ministers have no powers to tell the HSE, or the HSC, what to do, and that has readily been accepted by the House before. I shall make sure that my hon. Friend's views on the way in which the HSE has responded to his Act are drawn to the attention of the director, and I shall also comment to it on the number of my hon. Friends who have been here to listen to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 27 May 1993

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Early-day Motions

9.34 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is more with sorrow than with anger that I rise to put my point of order, of which I have given you prior notice. My views on abortion are well known. In the historic Protestant tradition, I totally oppose it, except where the life of the mother is in danger.

On 26 April 1993, two early-day motions appeared on the Order Paper. One of those reckoned that it was a sad day when the Abortion Act 1967 was passed by the House, and to that I affixed my name. The other welcomed the Abortion Act and called for universal abortion on demand for women. On 19 May, I heard that my name had been appended in error to the second of those early-day motions. I received a courteous and prompt letter from the Table Office saying:

"Due to an administrative error your name appeared in support of early-day motion 1863 (25th Anniversary of the Abortion Act 1967). I apologise for this error, and a corrigendum will appear in tomorrow's 'Blue Notices'."

The corrigendum appeared, saying:

"In the Notices of Motions given on Wednesday 19th May, on page 8662, the name of the Reverend Ian Paisley appeared in error in support of Early Day Motion 1863."

There I thought the matter would have rested. But when I was in Strasbourg late on Tuesday evening, the political correspondent of the *Belfast Newsletter*, Mr. Pauly, rang me and asked, "Have you done a U-turn on your attitude to abortion?" I said, "Certainly not." He said that he had received from the office of the official Ulster Unionist party in the House of Commons a fax claiming that I had done a U-turn, and containing comments by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) about my attitude and my supposed change of heart. I was appalled at that, and immediately got in touch with the Table Office so that it could fax me a copy of the letter that had already been sent.

I have never wavered on the issue of abortion.

Providentially, that all happened after the election was over. I do not know what effect it would have had if it had been an issue in the election. My problem, which I put to you, Madam Speaker, is that I do not know to how many newspapers the fax has been sent. I have received no written withdrawal from the hon. Member for Londonderry, East on the matter. I approached his leader and told him about the matter last night, and I regret that I have had to raise it.

I ask you, Madam Speaker, what action a Member of Parliament can take in such circumstances, when his reputation can be seriously damaged at a crucial time?

Madam Speaker: I think that the hon. Gentleman has now had the opportunity of putting the record straight, and I am pleased that he has been able to do so.

Human Rights

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. MacKay.]*

9.38 am

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): There is no magical bit of paper that can somehow defend our rights, and certainly a written Bill of Rights, although essential, is not a panacea. It can become meaningful only in a wider democracy, in which its values are accepted and practised by public authorities and private citizens. In order to build that sort of democratic practice in our country we need to take a long hard look at our democratic institutions and fundamentally reform them, and in some cases replace them, so that government at all levels can legitimately carry the stamp of democratic approval.

In essence, that means ending our long-unchallenged unitary system of government, in which all political power is decided in a winner-take-all general election, and establishing in our country for the first time a genuinely pluralist society in which many different centres of power are created, not dependent upon one another but each with its own electoral base and its own legitimacy, unafraid to challenge the monopoly of the over-powerful Executive in the United Kingdom.

That is the only long-term guarantee of our rights, ending the Executive's ability to control the Commons, to appoint the Lords, to select the judges, to instruct every local authority and to ignore Europe—centralised powers that would make a Stalin or even a Thatcher salivate.

Labour has crossed the great political watershed from unitarism—we no longer believe that we have the right to tell people what to do just because we are the good guys—to pluralism. There is a mature acceptance that people themselves should decide through democratic institutions what they want to do.

Since the election of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) as the leader of my party less than a year ago, Labour has committed itself to an impressive review of our democracy. We propose a Bill of Rights, scrutiny of prerogative powers, free-standing local government, elected regional authorities, a Scottish Parliament elected by the additional member system, an elected second Chamber under a proportional regional list system, a European Parliament elected on the same basis, and a thorough reform of the way in which this place works, in addition to a referendum on how we should elect Members to this the first Chamber.

Never again will an all-powerful Executive be able to control every facet of our political life. It is a frightening prospect for centralists everywhere, but an exciting one for democrats of all parties and at all representative levels of all parties. It is in that new context that the idea of human rights will find its home.

We are very complacent about our rights in this country. We like to think that abuses of rights take place elsewhere, but not in the United Kingdom. The reality is painfully different. It is almost so painful that we do not like to talk about it or even to admit that abuses exist. In a country with no clear list of rights, it is quite difficult to assess what rights have been abused. In a society that places emphasis on class and hierarchy, it is often the place one occupies rather than one's rights vis-a-vis other individuals that preoccupies many and colours their view of any abuse.

[Mr. Graham Allen]

All that is now changing. Old certainties are breaking down, and old social structures and values have been dealt the death blow by Thatcherism, by the atomisation of society and by the exaltation of greed. A social and a spiritual vacuum has been created. We in this place need to put new values and new ideas into that vacuum. A central part of that will be to develop clearly understood and widely accepted rights and responsibilities for the modern British citizen.

Such ideas are not alien to this country, as many would have us believe. We were the first founding signatories of the European convention on human rights, a convention incorporated into the legal system of most of our fellow European nations. I am proud to say that it was a Labour Government who signed the convention in 1951 and it was the Labour Government of Harold Wilson who gave United Kingdom citizens the right of individual petition to the European Commission and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

To the present Government's great shame, Britain as a country has since been found guilty of breaching the provisions of the treaty more often than any other member of the Council of Europe. Today, seven cases are proceeding against the Government in the European Court. One has been awaiting judgment for five years.

One of the major flaws of the European convention's being interpreted in Strasbourg rather than the British courts is the time it takes for cases of human rights abuse in Britain to be heard. The time is currently five or six years, after a petitioner has exhausted all other means of redress under domestic law. Anthony Lester, a noted expert in administrative and constitutional law, has predicted that, in future, cases will take a minimum of 10 years to be heard, and perhaps as many as 15 if current trends continue.

The consequence of the long wait and the associated expense is that only those with the backing of large organisations or with substantial personal resources can make use of the only guarantee of rights available to the United Kingdom citizen. That amounts to the creation of a two-tier system of rights in this country. Yes, our rights are guaranteed, but only the select few can enforce them.

I make it plain to the House today that that is wholly unacceptable. An incoming Labour Government will incorporate the European convention on human rights into our law, so that cases can be dealt with speedily in the British courts.

In the interim—the Conservatives pretend to be serious about human rights and about the delays—there is a need fundamentally to restructure the current two-tier, part-time court in Strasbourg and to replace it with a smaller, single-tier, permanently sitting court capable of dealing with the ever-increasing work load. That is the solution advocated by the vast majority of members of the Council of Europe.

Unfortunately, a small minority of Governments, regrettably including the British Conservative Government, have already been guilty of blocking the reform process. The Conservatives' intransigence is now preventing a workable solution from being reached—a solution that would enable the court to resume its role as a Europewide guarantor of human rights and minimum standards.

It is not surprising that the Government seek to frustrate the European Court. Between 1970 and 1978, 12 cases were commenced against the British Government. In the subsequent 12 years, 29 cases have been brought before the court. There are now more than 30 landmark decisions, as a result of which our Government have been forced to introduce new procedures to protect human rights. We were forced, kicking and screaming, by the European Court to change our laws.

None of the decisions has been trivial; some have been fundamental. They include ending unfair press curbs, ending unjust restrictions on prisoners' access to lawyers, ending unacceptable restrictions on husbands of immigrants, ending ineffective judicial protection of mental patients and requiring new controls on telephone tapping. I say with a heavy heart that, in Europe's league table of shame, Britain has the worst record by far of receiving adverse judgments in the European Court.

Ministers will, of course, point out that Britain's dismal record is in part due to the fact that we have not incorporated the European convention on human rights into United Kingdom law. We are unlike other countries, where people have a remedy for human rights abuses in their own country. If that is intended to excuse the violations of basic civil rights, it is a woefully poor excuse. It begs the question why we have not yet incorporated the European convention or similar rights into domestic law, as is the case for all our close European neighbours.

We can incorporate such rights for others. In Hong Kong in 1991, we introduced the international covenant on political and civil rights. We can do it in Hong Kong, but, with this Government, we still find it difficult to do it in our own country. We are now the only country in Europe or in the democratic Commonwealth without domestically enforceable political and civil rights. Perhaps all the other countries are wrong. Perhaps we have found the answer, and perhaps everyone else in the world is wrong on these matters.

Labour believes that, if people have rights and freedoms as individuals—we certainly believe that people have those rights—there is no problem about writing them down. If an individual's right as a consumer can be expressed in a citizens charter, why cannot his or her rights as a citizen be expressed clearly in a Bill of Rights? All schoolchildren should carry in their pocket or purse a list of their rights as individuals. They should grow with those rights, and knowing those rights, so that they can become full citizens of our society.

The justification that is often offered by those opposed to incorporation is that, in Britain, every citizen is protected by rights and freedoms under the common law. But those rights and freedoms are ill defined and incomplete, and are not accessible to or understood by the average citizen. One needs a law degree to have even an inkling of the challenges that can be made, let alone of the detail of the rights. The extent of such rights is controlled by the judges and not by Parliament. That is unacceptable. The job of judges is to interpret and apply the law and not to make it.

Some claim that incorporation would create a political judiciary: it would not. Many judicial decisions made today could be viewed as political, but are made outside the framework of a statute explicitly defining people's rights. Far from politicising judges, the incorporation of the European convention on human rights and a

subsequent British Bill of Rights would enable the judiciary to make decisions free from political pressure, thus guaranteeing its independence.

It is not as though our judges are incapable of deciding rights cases—indeed, many are themselves in favour of a Bill of Rights. The judiciary already makes decisions based on rights-oriented legislation, such as sex and race anti-discrimination laws, and there is no reason to suppose that it would be incapable of handling decisions once the European convention was incorporated.

If the Government are wary of granting judges the right to make decisions on basic rights, why do they not revoke the right of individual petition by a British subject to the European Court of Human Rights, where European judges make decisions? Perhaps the Government lack confidence only in British judges.

To suggest that incorporation would destroy the political impartiality of the judiciary is to display a shameful lack of confidence in those to whom we entrust the administration of the law. That suggestion is certainly odd coming from a Government who once sought to style themselves the Government of law and order.

Labour has no such worries about incorporating the European convention on human rights, although we accept the need for changes in methods of judicial recruitment and appointment and for an improved continuing education programme for the judiciary. I hope that the Lord Chancellor's Department will take those comments to heart.

It is not as if the European convention is some wild, radical, untested code. It is a mature statement of rights that has been interpreted and applied for many years. The United Kingdom has in reality been subject to its provisions for more than 45 years, and its incorporation into United Kingdom law as a first step to a home-grown British Bill of Rights would merely ensure that all could quickly have the benefit of its provisions. It would make rights in the United Kingdom a matter for United Kingdom citizens and the United Kingdom courts, and would prevent the perpetuation of the notice that rights are some strange foreign European concept.

Incorporation would not be particularly complicated. Parliament would merely need to pass an Act incorporating the convention into British law and giving citizens the right to have the rules enforced in court. In that context, I hope to be presenting to the House within the next couple of weeks a Bill that would make incorporation a reality.

All Acts, previous and subsequent, would be stated to be consistent with the provisions of the convention. The exclusion of any Act from those provisions would require an explicit statement of intent. That would allow a Government—for example, at a time of national crisis—to pass legislation curtailing individual rights, but would also ensure that no legislation could be interpreted as breaching the convention unless that was specifically stated.

Incorporation will take place speedily under the next Labour Government and will be just a beginning. We shall then need to examine—perhaps by means of an all-party commission—a home-grown British Bill of Rights. I suspect that that will have to be the subject of my next Adjournment debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For the past 14 years, we have watched the Government ride roughshod over our rights. It is time that the balance was redressed. Our current constitutional system of checks and balances is in no way adequate for what is allegedly a modern democracy. We need to re-establish the fundamental pillar of democracy—the separation of powers. We need to consider once again the balance between the powers of the legislature, the Executive and the judiciary, and a Bill of Rights will be central to such a re-examination of political and democratic theory.

Far too much power is placed in the hands of the Executive, without adequate restraint being exercised either by what is now a client House of Commons or by a House of Lords with a built-in majority in favour of one party. I take this opportunity to remind my hon. Friends that, although there is a tendency to regard the House of Lords as a quaint institution that has occasionally overturned minor matters of Government policy in the past 14 years, it defeated the last Labour Government 350 times.

We need to examine that situation before we allow ourselves to let pass any commitments on an elected second Chamber. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition said a week ago, the second House should be elected under a regional list system on the basis of proportional representation. The sooner that happens, the less likely it is that the will of the people as expressed in the House of Commons will be subverted.

Ministers have suggested that Parliament is best placed to protect the rights of the individual. At best, that is wishful thinking; at worst, it is worrying political naivety. We should remember the local government legislation, what happened at GCHQ, Zircon, the "Spycatcher" debacle, the broadcasting ban, deportations without trial: all are instances of the way in which individual rights have been diminished, ignored or abused. That list is in no way definitive; time dictates that I curtail it.

The fact that all the abuses that I have mentioned have occurred under the Conservative Government should not be taken to mean that rights need protection only under an arrogant Conservative Administration, grown fat from being in power for too long. Our rights should not depend on who wins a general election.

The rights and principles enshrined in the convention are far too important to be subject to the whims of temporary majorities—even Labour majorities—in the Commons or to unnecessary interference by public officials. Without the incorporation of the European convention on human rights, our citizens' rights cannot be guaranteed. That is the essential first step.

In the country at large, there is a feeling that Britain's archaic and dusty formerly democratic structures are no longer capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of its citizens. Nowhere is that more obvious than in the lack of protection for our individual human rights. The time has come for fundamental change, and incorporation is just one part of Labour's radical agenda for the democratic renewal of Britain.

Incorporation will come—either from a reluctant Conservative Government or early in the lifetime of a new Labour Government. Thereafter, we hope to build upon incorporation and ensure that we have a genuine well thought out British Bill of Rights, which I hope will command a consensus in the Chamber. If we can achieve that consensus and build human rights into our domestic law, our country will be far stronger and our democracy will find deeper roots—roots that will stretch to every citizen in the United Kingdom, who will then have a stake in defending and extending our democracy.

9.59 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): May I first congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on his success in obtaining the first of this morning's Adjournment debates? There was a stage earlier this week when I thought that he and I might be debating immigration and asylum matters, as we have done on so many recent occasions. However, I am absolutely delighted about his choice of subject.

I listened with some incredulity to his description of a pliant House of Commons. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been for the past month or two with regard to the Chamber. I am aware of all his hard work off the Committee Corridor, but anyone who listened to the Maastricht debates or to some of our other recent debates would not consider this House to be a pliant House.

The hon. Gentleman referred to complacency about rights, and I disagree with him fundamentally on that. I believe that we treasure our rights in this country. The basic difference between the hon. Gentleman's proposition and the view of this Government and of successive Governments relates to the supremacy of Parliament.

The hon. Gentleman asked why some cases were referred to the European Court and why we were content with that procedure. Any decision taken by the European judges which requires changes in legislation here must still be considered by the House and agreed by this Parliament. That thereby maintains the constitutional position of Parliament and its supremacy.

The hon. Gentleman has shown that he attaches great importance to the protection of the rights of the citizens of this country, and I cannot disagree with him on that. The possession of rights and freedoms by our people has been fundamental to our democratic traditions reaching back over the centuries. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we would ignore that at our peril. I suspect that the entire House would agree with him to that extent.

However, it will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to learn that I disagree strongly with his basic proposition. In summary, his argument is as follows: that the rights of individual citizens in this country are being systematically undermined, that there are no adequate arrangements for the protection of those rights, and that that can be resolved only by what would amount to far-reaching constitutional changes.

The hon. Gentleman made much of comparisons with other countries and specific examples of what he claims to be domestic human rights abuses, of which he listed a number. I will attempt to consider one or two of those later. However, it is worth placing the whole question of human rights in the United Kingdom in a proper constitutional context.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister for his usual courtesy in giving way. He said that we treasure our rights in this country. Will he tell the House what those rights are?

Mr. Wardle: They are the rights enshrined in our parliamentary democracy; I will seek to expand on that. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may feign surprise, but as he has been a Member of this House for some years, I think that he understands precisely what I mean.

Contrary to the impression given by critics of the present arrangements, this country's approach to rights and freedoms is more permissive than that found elsewhere. The possession of rights and freedoms is assumed. It is not dependent on their enshrinement in statute or through some other constitutional device. That means that only through specific action by Parliament—this relates to the point raised by the hon. Gentleman in his intervention—can those rights be curtailed.

There is an important and underlying principle here—that rights and freedoms are, in general, the property of individuals. They are not something to be bestowed by the state. We have heard criticisms that that approach to human rights in the United Kingdom is both ineffective and inappropriate to modern circumstances.

I do not believe that those who argue in that way have begun to show their case. Nor have they convinced me of the argument, which inevitably follows, that the only certain way of protecting the rights of our citizens is through some form of Bill of Rights, perhaps incorporating the European convention on human rights, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, and possibly entrenched in a written constitution, as some have suggested.

I express it in that way because many of those proposing such a measure tend to be less than clear about the form that it will take. The Government do not believe that one can guarantee rights by the enactment of broad propositions. This is more a question of political culture, as can be seen by the prevalence of human rights abuses in certain parts of the world which nevertheless can boast a Bill of Rights on the statute book.

It is perhaps worth recalling that, in 1978, the House of Lords Select Committee on a Bill of Rights concluded that, in any country, whatever its constitution, the existence or absence of legislation in the nature of a Bill of Rights can in practice play only a minor part in the protection of human rights. That Committee also concluded that it had received no evidence that human rights were better protected in countries which had a code of basic rights embodied in their law than they were in the United Kingdom. In spite of the hon. Gentleman's assertion, I can see no reason to think that things have changed since 1978.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Wardle: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am good-natured. Although I am watching the clock, I will give way.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister once more for his typical generosity in giving way for a second time.

I agree that, to write down rights, as I said when I began my speech, is not a panacea, and it guarantees nothing. It simply provides a framework, which is helpful, and accesses rights to the ordinary citizen. I hope that the Minister will accept that.

The Minister will have heard me say that I will be introducing a Bill which will incorporate the European convention. The Minister was right to say that such things are very often vague. Will he therefore, with his normal generosity, allow me to send him a copy of my Bill for him to peruse and amend, without of course committing himself to accepting it, so that we can have a less vague document before the House and have another productive and constructive discussion like the one that we are having this morning?

Mr. Wardle: All I can guarantee is that, as usual, I will consider very carefully any representations that the hon.

Gentleman makes. I cannot guarantee what the response will be, and he is aware that I am not in the business of making such promises.

I want to make progress, because I want to answer the general thrust of the hon. Gentleman's arguments. The political culture of the United Kingdom, with its strong system of law and parliamentary democracy, is soundly based. An essential part of that is an assumption and expectation on behalf of our citizens that certain rights and freedoms are theirs. Governments must seek to achieve a balance whereby the individual enjoys the optimum level of freedom.

Clearly it is necessary for the Government to strike a balance between the rights of the individual and of society at large and on the conflict of rights between various groups in society. However, given the nature of our society, to restrict the rights of our citizens is not an easy matter. Any Government seeking to do that would need to satisfy both public opinion and, beyond that, Parliament itself. I find it strange that those who argue for a Bill of Rights are so ready to dismiss the role of Parliament in this important area.

It is surely more consistent with our democratic traditions that decisions on crucial issues like this, which will affect the lives of many people, should be taken by those whom the people of this country have elected to represent them rather than placed in the hands of the judiciary, who after all are not elected.

I also find it surprising that it is suggested that a Bill of Rights would somehow be more sensitive to the changing needs of our people than Parliament would be in fulfilling its traditional role of enacting legislation in specific areas. A Bill of Rights, after all, can only embody the values of the time when it was drafted. The whole purpose of a Bill of Rights and its entrenchment into law, by whatever means, is to offer some permanent benchmark by which the actions of Government and the freedoms enjoyed by citizens can be judged.

However, public attitudes, and therefore the attitudes of society, are capable of change. We only have to consider how public opinion on a number of social and moral issues has developed over the past 50 years, 25 years, or, as some would say, the past decade. A Bill of Rights for the United Kingdom drafted 25 years ago would be most unlikely to reflect fully the aspirations and views of people today. However, any Bill of Rights that was subject to frequent amendment, if that were constitutionally possible, would surely defeat the object of the whole exercise.

The hon. Gentleman referred particularly to the possible incorporation of the European convention on human rights into domestic law. I shall deal with some of the points that he raised about that.

As the House knows, the Government are firm believers in and supporters of the European convention on human rights. The United Kingdom was closely associated with the convention at the outset, playing a major part in its drafting in 1950. We accepted the right of individual petition to the Commission in 1966 and agreed to be bound by the judgments of the court. We have been diligent in observing the court's judgments, as even our most diehard critics would acknowledge.

It has been claimed that we compare unfavourably with other countries in the number of findings of violations being recorded against the United Kingdom, and that that demonstrates the need for more effective domestic protection of the rights of our citizens. But taken at face value, the available statistics in this field give a misleading impression.

Other factors need to be taken into account. For example, the United Kingdom has accepted the right of individual petition since 1966, whereas a number of other countries did so much more recently—France and Spain in 1981, and Turkey as recently as 1986. Since it can take up to five years for an application to be decided by the court of Committee of Ministers, it is not surprising that fewer violations have been found in the case of those countries which came to the table more recently, as it were.

The other important point that our critics choose to ignore is the difference in population size of the member states of the Council of Europe. If we had regard to violations per head of population, the United Kingdom would be ninth in the convention league table as at 30 April this year. Therefore, we regard as fallacious the argument that breaches against the United Kingdom demonstrate the need for incorporation, as some have argued.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann) *rose*——

Mr. Wardle: I want to make progress. I have already given way and tried to be as generous as possible to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). I hope that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will allow me to continue.

It is true that the delays in resolving cases before the Commission and the court are unacceptable, and that the machinery needs reform. The United Kingdom is playing a full part in the current work that is being undertaken to find ways of reforming the machinery while maintaining the quality of jurisprudence.

However, it is wrong to suggest that those delays bear uniquely on United Kingdom applicants, because, in the absence of incorporation, they have no opportunity to test their cases domestically. The fact is that, even where countries have incorporated the convention, their citizens can and do apply to the Commission in large numbers once they have exhausted their domestic remedies before their constitutional courts.

Judges have a vital role in the enforcement, application and development of the abstraction that we call the rule of law. It is the Government's firm view that imposing on the judges a duty to interpret the convention, or broad principles in a Bill of Rights, would add an unwelcome new dimension to their current role. That new role would be to decide broad issues of policy.

It is worth contemplating for a moment what that would mean in practice. A Bill of Rights would enable Parliament to pass a law, which could, the next day or next year, be struck down by a judge who, acting in good faith, took a different view according to his own perceptions of the public interest.

Not only would that undermine the sovereignty of Parliament—it would bring the judiciary into the political arena. The more we draw judges into political matters, the more we shall create problems for them in terms of the general public's attitude and respect for them. The point is not that our judges could not do the job—our fears are that such a job would damage their reputation and standing.

That is not to dismiss the important role that our judges can play in the protection of our citizens against the

[Mr. Wardle]

actions of Government. The hon. Member for Nottingham, North has drawn a picture of an Executive out of control, with no effective check on its actions. I have heard him talk about that before. The readiness of the citizens of the United Kingdom to seek judicial review of Government actions, and of the courts to entertain such applications, gives the lie to that argument.

This is an important safeguard against the unreasonable exercise of discretion by the Government. But what it does not do, which their interpretation of a Bill of Rights would do, is seek to challenge the merits of the broader policy issues.

I do not accept the proposition that these cases demonstrate that there has been some general erosion of human rights in this country. On the contrary, an objective examination of the record in recent years would show many areas in which rights have been extended. That has been achieved usually through Parliament, whose role the hon. Gentleman has lightly dismissed today. It is disappointing that there was in his speech, no recognition of the role of Parliament as he is such an active member of the House.

We can honestly claim to have a more open Government than ever before. That is the result of measures that have been initiated in recent years. The Data Protection Act 1984 provides a good example of how Parliament can legislate to afford rights in specific areas —in this case, access by individuals to information held about them on computers. Legislation has also been enacted in respect of information held by local authorities.

The Official Secrets Act 1988 cut back the information that is protected against disclosure by the criminal law. It replaced the previous casual provisions of section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 with a narrowly targeted scheme that penalised only an authorised disclosure of official information which would give rise to a serious degree of harm to the interests of the country. More generally, the Government have demonstrated their commitment to open government, and have done more than any of their predecessors to open the processes of government to the scrutiny of Parliament.

There are other examples of Parliament acting to enhance the rights of individuals. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 was one such measure. Measures such as that—there are many more—are often ignored in any discussion on human rights in the United Kingdom. Yet, in terms of practical consequences, they have more direct relevance to the lives of our citizens than a list of broad principles set out in a Bill of Rights.

Parliament devotes much care and attention to measures of this kind. In doing so, it properly exercises its role, for which its Members were elected, of determining how to respond to the changing needs of society. There is no evidence to suggest that the absence of some overarching Bill of Rights——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I call the Rev. Ian Paisley.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hesitate to raise this matter, but you will have noted that the Minister was unable to finish his brief. I wonder whether you will deprecate the fact that the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) delayed the commencement of the Adjournment debate by raising a long point of order on an issue which we know he feels strongly about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker allowed the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) because it was in order. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is doing exactly what he is complaining the hon. Member for Antrim, North did earlier—taking time out of the next debate.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Chair should rule that what happened earlier was wrong. My point of order did not last five minutes and effectively terminate unnecessarily early a debate that was taking place, which was of interest to a number of hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That matter has already been dealt with.

Ulster (Bombings)

10.16 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): In opening this debate today, I shall emphasise what was emphasised in a leader in the *Belfast Newsletter* yesterday. The leader said that the first thing that should be taken as read is our support for the security forces in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, those of us who have been discussing security in the aftermath of the bombings have been criticised and attacked by Northern Ireland Ministers as though we were attacking the security forces. I should like to record our support for the security forces. That cannot be challenged.

The leader said:

"There is simply no use in Ministers hiding behind a smokescreen of jingoism or patriotism. They are the last refuges of the incompetent and uncaring members of the Cabinet. In the context of Northern Ireland, official smokescreens, indecision, procrastination and a lack of care and courage in high places inevitably leads to more deaths of innocent people, and more destruction."

I hope that the Minister will not tell us that, because we have raised these matters of grave concern, we are in some way undermining the authority and morale of and support for the security forces.

On Wednesday 19 May, the Northern Ireland electorate went to the polls in a local government election. Many people, including Northern Ireland Ministers, wanted to see the party I lead whipped in that election. I am glad that my party increased its share of the Unionist vote by 2 per cent., and that in Belfast increased 3·28 per cent. in the total overall vote. I am satisfied, therefore, that I have a mandate to speak in the House this morning.

Sinn Fein candidates ran in the election. It is a disgrace that the Government permit the IRA to use the guise of democracy to bring legitimacy to their organisation. Sinn Fein-IRA should be proscribed. The Government should have the moral courage to take that action.

Of course, Sinn Fein now has further legitimacy from the talks being conducted by the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party and Sinn Fein-IRA. In the election, 77,984 people voted for Sinn Fein. Those people are by no means ignorant of the consequences of their actions. They sent a message to the IRA leadership that they found the campaign of violence, destruction and murder acceptable. The vast majority of people find it unacceptable. They want the Government to take action against the men of violence and the apologists for violence.

On 20 May, the IRA showed where its preference lay. It was in the blitzing of Great Victoria street in Belfast. That bomb exploded at 8.30 am. It contained 1,000 lb of explosives. The Belfast Europa hotel, the Grand opera house, the Ulster bus station and the offices of the Ulster Unionist party were all seriously damaged by that bomb. Twenty people were injured. It is only a miracle that people were not killed. The cost of repairs to Belfast stands at about £6·5 million.

Not content with that horrendous scar on the face of the city of Belfast, the IRA exploded a second bomb in Portadown town centre, a predominantly Protestant town, at 11.26 am on Saturday 22 May. It also contained 1,000 lb of explosives. Last year, the IRA attacked the Protestant areas surrounding Portadown, when it exploded a 1,000 lb bomb in Lurgan and a 2,000 lb bomb in Craigavon in 1991. A 60-year-old woman was seriously injured in Saturday's bombing by a piece of shrapnel. The cost of repairs to Portadown stands at £8 million.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would underline that misleading and inaccurate telephone messages were given about the location of the bomb in Portadown and that the behaviour of the IRA in that respect was consistent with an intention to cause considerable civilian casualties. It was only as a result of the good fortune that the police spotted the bomb long before the warnings that casualties were avoided.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I accept what the hon. Gentleman, who represents that area in the House, has said. When the votes were counted in that area, and one of the Sinn Fein candidates was defeated, from the agents of Sinn Fein around the table there came the words, "But we have a buster for this town." That buster was the explosion of the bomb.

I understand that, when the Prime Minister spoke to Congressmen in America, he emphasised the close relationship between the IRA and Sinn Fein. If he is prepared to say that, in America, I do not know why he does not take instant steps here to have Sinn Fein outlawed.

Not content with the destruction in Portadown, and undeterred by any security presence, the intensity of the bombing was stepped up. Once again, Belfast was the target for the illicit activities of those encouraged by the Sinn Fein voters. At 1.26 am, a 200-lb bomb devastated the Drumkeen hotel in Protestant east Belfast. The bomb also damaged the housing surrounding that business. I visited those houses early on Sunday morning, as I represent that area in the European Parliament.

I spoke to a mother who told me that no warning whatever was given to those houses. She said, "My child cried to be taken to the toilet. I lifted him from his bed. When I got to the bathroom door, I was lifted by the force of the blast, and we both found ourselves in the bath. When I came out of the toilet afterwards to take my son past the bedroom where he had been sleeping, a large piece of glass like the head of a spear had pierced through the pillow where that young child had been lying half a minute before." So it was only a miracle that there were not terrible casualties in that bombing.

It is the fourth time in 12 months that the IRA has bombed the Drumkeen hotel. Three people are in hospital as a result. A newly-wed couple had their wedding reception shattered to pieces by the explosion. The damage is estimated at £2·5 million.

Sunday was once again desecrated by bomb No. 4, in Magherafelt town centre at 10.21 on Sunday night. A 300-lb bomb blitzed the centre, and 20 shops and offices in Broad street were destroyed. The bus station, which had been rehabilitated, was annihilated and the two main banks in the town are practically rubble. The cost is estimated at £5 million.

That quartet of destruction costing £22 million in four days has been an attack at the heart of the Province. My colleague who sits on Magherafelt council and represents the Mid-Ulster constituency around which Magherafelt is spread—Magherafelt itself is in the East Londonderry constituency after the last border changes—is in America

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

seeking business for the town. But what success can he possibly have in meeting companies when the heart of Magherafelt has been destroyed?

I understand that it is estimated that last year investment programmes worth £10 million did not come about because of the absolute terror that the name "Northern Ireland" brings to people's minds. The current blitz reinforces those attitudes, and well Sinn Fein-IRA knows it.

What then is to be done? Will we simply repeat, "Business as usual", as we must often do? Will we simply pay the higher insurance premiums? Will we see a cosmetic security presence for three weeks run down and retreat? If that is all we get from the Government, the IRA will be bombing as usual, in the business of terror as usual, and the security forces will be on a reactive course as usual.

Over a year ago, the leaders of the official Unionists and the SDLP and I had a unique meeting with the Prime Minister, when we discussed the then deteriorating security situation. Once again, I put to the right hon. Gentleman the proposals contained in my party's security document, which calls for an offensive against the IRA. By that we do not mean what the Secretary of State has interpreted it to mean. He slanders us when he says that we want to remove all restraints from the security forces so that they can be let loose to break any law they like, as long as they get the IRA.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is an ambiguity in the statements of successive Secretaries of State that the full rigours of the law are being used against the IRA? In fact, the previous Secretary of State admitted that the Government were not using the full rigours of the law. We are calling not for the removal of restraints but for the forceful use of the law.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I accept that. It is wrong that the representatives from Northern Ireland have to answer to the people when the Secretary of State makes such a statement about security. The Secretary of State should face up to those people. He should try to explain why he is not prepared to follow the course that we are advocating. Instead, he puts up a straw man of his own making by claiming that we are advocating that the security forces should act exactly as the IRA does and kill, maim and bomb. That is not what we are suggesting.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to refer to my constituency and the terrible bomb at the Drumkeen hotel. Does he recognise that the people in that area view with utmost horror the response of the Secretary of State who, when asked after four days of bombing, whether he would change the direction of the failed security policy, said that he was quite happy and content with that present policy? People have no confidence in a Secretary of State who behaves in that manner.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, I accept that. That reaction has been fed to me by those people, because I visited all the affected areas. The present security policy is not succeeding. We should open our eyes to that.

The Minister need only consider what has happened in this part of the United Kingdom to understand that the security policy has failed. I have a list of all the acts of terror that have been committed on the mainland since 17 December. Those who have been brought to court are just a mere handful of the culprits. That action has solved nothing. Matters have not been resolved on the mainland, but we in Northern Ireland are receiving the full brunt of the IRA attack.

Unfortunately, I must tell the House that that attack will continue; it is not a one-off. It is encouraged by what Mr. Spring said down in Dublin when he was briefed on the talks that had been held between Gerry Adams, the IRA-Sinn Fein president, and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume). Mr. Spring stated:

"They know what they have to do to be part of the process. I believe that"

the hon. Member for Foyle

"is trying to get these people into the peace process by ending the violence, and I hope he succeeds in that."

The Minister should tell us whether that is the policy of the Government. If Sinn Fein states that it intends to call a ceasefire and to stop the violence, will its representatives be invited to the table for talks? Will such a ceasefire make it clear that the IRA must hand in its weapons, its stocks of bombing material and completely repudiate violence? I want to know from the Government what their policy is.

Those of us from Northern Ireland are aware of the mounting campaign of propaganda to get Sinn Fein to the table. What conditions would be set if, tomorrow, the leaders of Sinn Fein and the IRA said that there would be a ceasefire? It is not satisfactory to the people of Northern Ireland that the people who perpetrated all the acts of violence should be able to sit at the table simply by making a pronouncement that they intend to call a ceasefire and give up violence.

The Unionist people are alienated, whether the Government like it or not. That is a fact, and the Minister must face up to it. Every day, that alienation is increasing, and every day that alienation is taking a turn down the road that we all dread. As a representative of the people of Northern Ireland, I would be failing them and myself if I did not warn the Government that we face a grave, serious situation.

I have told the Government over and over again that they should decide whether they would prefer to talk to elected representatives or to people who are not elected but who are prepared to bomb, kill and main. I refer to people on the Protestant side, although I refuse to lend them the right of the name "Protestant".

We are faced with a serious, gloomy, dark situation, to which the Minister must face up. The Government must stop alienating the Protestant people, and they can do so by dealing effectively with the IRA. They should spell out that any announcement of a ceasefire is not enough. It is not enough for people to pose and say, "We will give up violence." Those very men could then say at the table, "All right, if you don't go the way we want to go, we can turn it on again." How can anybody have peace in those circumstances? Those people need to bring forth fruits, meet for their repentance.

It is dangerous for Mr. Spring to encourage the IRA in the belief that, if it announces a ceasefire, it will be able to join the talks. I trust that the Minister will rebuke the southern Minister and make it clear that that is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government. If that rebuke is not forthcoming, the people of Northern Ireland will be alienated still more.

I do not understand why the business community of Northern Ireland should be held to ransom by a security system that stops all traffic from entering the commercial centres in the mornings and sometimes in the evenings. The security forces know the areas in which the bombs are made and from where they are transported, and I do not understand why they are not given the task of blocking the exits from those areas so that the bombs cannot be transported.

Why should the law-abiding citizens and the business community of Northern Ireland be held to ransom? No wonder the ordinary man in the street believes that the policy after each bombing is that of locking the stable door after the horse has gone. The Minister must take that on board. The only way in which to deal with the problem is by blocking their exits from certain areas so that people cannot transport their bombs to anywhere they like.

Did the police have certain intelligence on Friday evening that a bombing might take place in Portadown? That is generally said to be the case among the business community in Portadown. Was there a relaxing of security in that area as a result of a police directive some weeks ago? Is it the case that, on Saturday, the police in Portadown were hard pushed and reserves had to be called in from elsewhere which would not usually be used? Will the Minister answer those questions, which are disturbing the minds of many in the business community to whom I have spoken?

What is the Government's attitude to the border? Will they seek to seal it off? It is to the Government's shame that, every time the Secretary of State attends an Anglo-Irish conference, the Government issue a statement saying that the relationship between the police and the Garda was never so good. They have said that at every meeting. It must surely be through the heavens by now. All the Irish papers today report that the relationship was never so good.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): The hon. Gentleman will recall that a number of police officers have been murdered by a sniper using a telescopic lens operating from the other side of the border who has not yet been apprehended.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman is right. But the Government's comment is that there never was better security and co-operation. The country of the south of Ireland hides the men of violence.

What about Angelo Fusco, the IRA murderer? He has been sentenced to three life terms for murder. He is not in jail. He is free in the Irish Republic. He is not even in hiding. The local council pays him £140 per week in benefits for his wife and family and has provided him with comfortable furnished accommodation in Tralee, where he spends his days fishing, riding his imported American motor cycle and acting as a pretentious godfather of violence.

Another convicted IRA killer, Paul Magee, was freed on bail by the Irish courts in April. Where is this co-operation? Nothing is said about those men at the Anglo-Irish conferences, or nothing is done, and the people in Northern Ireland are asking the simple question, "What on earth are the Government playing at?"

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the worst example of the lot is that the IRA headquarters issues its statements from an office in Dublin?

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, I accept that wholeheartedly. I also accept that the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party used the same machine that is used to send out reports of the bombings to issue a report on his talks with Gerry Adams. The release was headed "Sinn Fein". I have a copy of that. The two leaders put out their information together in that way.

Today I read more disturbing information concerning a republican business man in Northern Ireland who runs several lorries round Northern Ireland distributing the goods that he manufactures. He said that he has contacted the RUC and told it that, if any of his business transactions were delayed due to traffic hold-ups at checkpoints, he would sue the RUC for damages. Where are we getting to in our Province? I should like the Minister to say that such requests, if they can be called requests, will be met with the reply that, if we need to take security actions, we will take them irrespective of what happens.

Terrorism in Northern Ireland has cost 3,056 lives, and IRA bombs have cost £1,000 million in two decades. Death and destruction have become a way of life. Today, Northern Ireland has a simple message to the House—enough death, enough destruction and enough ineptitude by the Government.

10.14 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Mates): I have listened with great care to the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I understand and share his anger and distress, and that of the other hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland constituencies who are here this morning, at these cowardly and cynical attacks. The sympathy of the House goes out to those whose homes and livelihoods have been wrecked and to those who have been injured, and we send our best wishes to them for a safe and speedy recovery. Were it not for the alertness and quick response of the security forces, to whom the community is so much indebted, casualties might have been much higher.

I have seen for myself the damage caused in Belfast. I was due to go to Portadown on Tuesday but, as hon. Members will know, I was detained here for the debate on the Railways Bill. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has visited Magherafelt. The terrorists of the Provisional IRA, like their loyalist counterparts, debase the causes by their barbarity and criminality that they claim to represent. But even by their standards, the attempt to dignify the shattering of the livelihoods and homes of hundreds of ordinary citizens, Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and nationalists, by describing them as attacks on economic targets is despicable in the extreme.

Schools—secondary, primary and nursery—have been damaged, as has a home for the mentally handicapped and more than 300 private dwellings. Where do they figure in the terrorists' definition of legitimate or economic targets? We hear so much about the IRA's so-called concern for the unintended victims of their attacks. We hear of their hypocritical apologies. They disgust me and will disgust all Members of the House.

[Mr. Michael Mates]

Let no one be deceived: the terrorists cannot cloak their deeds in any false legitimacy, attempting to justify their actions as assaults on a British war machine. As on so many other occasions, including the bombing of 1,000 homes last September at Newtownbreda, they care not whom they hurt.

The fact is that many ordinary people—men, women and children—are targets for the terrorists on both sides. The fact that those attacks have been deliberately timed to take place in the immediate aftermath of the local government elections serves simply to underscore two points—the terrorists' contempt for the democratic process and their misunderstanding of the British Government and the people of Northern Ireland.

Terrorism will not prevail. I simply state the inescapable truth. The resolve of the Government and the people during the past 23 years has been tested by evil assaults from terrorists of all kinds. That resolve has not weakened, nor will it. Those who think otherwise mistake the character of the people of these islands. They particularly mistake the mettle of the people of Belfast, Portadown and Magherafelt. The fact that, despite the bombing, the traditional may fair was successfully held yesterday in Magherafelt is typical of the resilience and courage of the whole community in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about Sinn Fein and the IRA and a ceasefire. I repeat what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said some months ago. A cessation of violence, for whatever reason, would be welcomed by all hon. Members. But simply to say that there will be a ceasefire does not give anyone who espouses violence the right to come to any conference table or to be accepted. That is the British Government's position.

There would have to be not only a cessation of violence but a renunciation of violence as a means of achieving political ends. That is the sine qua non; that is the dividing line that has to be crossed by the men of violence before those who want to see change, or want to see life pursued by democratic means, will talk to them. Until that has happened and has been shown to have happened, there is no question that this Government or, I suspect, any other will deal with the men of violence.

The work of clearing up and restoring the damage so wantonly caused is well under way. Following all four incidents, the emergency services and Government bodies —including the Housing Executive, Compensation Agency, civil representatives, social workers and social security staff—were quickly on the scene to help begin the process, by carrying out repairs and providing advice. That work is continuing, with the local authorities playing a vital co-ordinating role. Wherever we have gone, the people seem to have been very pleased with the way that the authorities have responded.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I share the Minister's tribute to the response made by different agencies, but can he assure us that, in speaking to his alter ego, he will ensure that money will be forthcoming to get businesses back in business? Above all, will he ensure that the security presence is not removed because of lack of overtime payments?

Mr. Mates: I certainly give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance in respect of his latter point—that has never been the case, and never will be. As to his other point, we always do our best. However, the Compensation Agency is spending Government money, and the rules for the disbursement of taxpayers' money must be observed.

I have made every effort, and I know that the Compensation Agency will continue to make every effort, to make interim payments as quickly as possible. The legalities arise with final payments, and sometimes they do get held up—but that is for reasons by which we are all bound, because we are paying out taxpayers' money.

The security of the realm and the safety of its citizens are duties all Governments must make their first priority. It is the first priority of the Government in Northern Ireland, who set the policy and provide the resources. To confront and defeat terrorism is also the overriding concern of the Chief Constable, supported by the General Officer Commanding, who directs the operations of the security forces to achieve that goal.

We each bear responsibility for it, in different ways; and so does everybody in society. We each have our part to play in protecting those most fundamental human rights —the right to life, and the right to live free from fear and intimidation and the destruction of one's home and livelihood. The threat to those rights comes from terrorism, and we are committed to overcoming that threat, from whatever quarter it comes.

The security forces carry out and will continue to carry out a whole range of operations, including patrolling, checkpoints and searches, to disrupt and deter the activities of the terrorists. The House will know that the police and the Army continue to achieve very significant successes. To the beginning of May this year, 136 people have been charged with terrorism-related offences, and 84 firearms, 20 rocket and mortar launchers and large amounts of explosives and bomb-making equipment have been recovered.

Let me give some specific examples. Since the middle of March, four bombs in transit, containing over 300 kg of explosives, have been intercepted, resulting in several arrests. More than 6,500 kg of fertilizer, used in the manufacture of explosives, have been recovered. A range of other weaponry has been seized, and several other murderous attacks by paramilitaries on both sides foiled, with the capture of republican and loyalist gunmen en route to commit murder. As a result, those charged since the end of March include two with murder, two with attempted murder, two with conspiracy to murder and possession, and two with possession of weapons or explosives.

The publication this morning of the Chief Constable's report for 1992 provides further evidence of the excellent work which the RUC has carried out during the year. As the Chief Constable brings out in his foreword to the report, the RUC, with the Army in support, has continued to maintain the essential stability of the Province.

Day in and day out, the security forces work ceaselessly not just to respond and react but to be a step ahead of the terrorists. They make real inroads into terrorist operations. They aim to deter as well as to detect.

Much of that work is necessarily unpublicised, but it may give some idea of the scope of the operations if I say that, in addition to the numerous patrols of various kinds operated by the RUC each day, the Army undertakes hundreds of patrols in the Province day in, day out. Let no one doubt that many more prospective terrorist operations

fail or are aborted than come to fruition. That may not be newsworthy, but it is vital to the safety of every member of the community in Northern Ireland.

But let there be no suspicion that there is any complacency, either in Government or in the security forces. The Chief Constable keeps constantly under review the pattern of security force operations in the light of the prevailing security situation. He is not only responsible for all security operations but is also the Secretary of State's principal adviser on security matters, and the Secretary of State met him for a full review of the security situation earlier this week.

The security forces will continue to receive all the support that they require from the Government. Sometimes, I get the feeling that Ministers can say that until they are blue in the face but will not be believed, so perhaps the House will be interested to know that the Chief Constable had this to say at his press conference to launch his report this morning:

"When a terrorist outrage occurs there is often a reaction suggesting that the handcuffs should be taken off the police and the Army—that our hands should be untied from behind our backs. There are no restraints on the security forces save those imposed by the law and by the very nature of our democratic society. There is no political restraint stopping us from doing our duty or doing our best. What we have asked the Government we have received, and if more is needed at any time we shall ask for more and expect to receive it."

I know that, coming from my lips, those words may be greeted with cynicism, but I hope that they are not greeted with cynicism when they come from the lips of the Chief Constable.

There are no operational options from which the security forces are being held back for political reasons. The only constraint, as the Chief Constable said, is that they must operate within the law. The Government's security policy is clear: terrorism will be met with stern and unyielding opposition, by forces that act proactively as well as defensively. The operation of that policy by the security forces must be both within the law and effective, in the sense of leading towards a lasting peace, as well as affording immediate protection to people from terrorist attack, and bringing about the capture of terrorists and their conviction in the courts.

That aim cannot be achieved, in any real or meaningful sense, by the use of measures which step outside the law, or which seek to impose, through draconian force, an artificial "peace". Even if such an approach were sucessful in creating a temporary calm—and that is open to question—it would not be a lasting one. The damage which such measures would cause to the integrity and credibility of constitutional politics, and of the institutions of the state, would be irreparable.

To do so would not only be wrong—it would, I believe, be ineffective. Civilised society must deal with terrorism effectively and decisively—but within the law, or else the divisions which the terrorists feed off may simply be deepened. As I have said, we all have a part to play in defending our society and the lives of our neighbours.

The Chief Constable has emphasised the importance of close co-operation between the police and the community they serve in isolating and defeating the terrorists. The RUC does not, and cannot, operate at a remove from the community. If loss of life is to be prevented, we must use our sense of right and wrong, take our responsibility as citizens of a civilised society, and act upon it in support of the law.

To quote the Chief Constable's report once more, recent events

"point clearly to the pressing need for a positive, concerted, cross-community alliance against violence with unequivocal support for firm and impartial action by the police and Army".

Co-operation with the police is the wedge that will isolate the terrorists.

The Government for their part are committed to providing the security forces with the resources they need to undertake their difficult and dangerous tasks. In the past two years, the establishment of the RUC has been raised by 441 officers, the recruitment and training of whom has now been completed, while two reinforcement battalions of soldiers have been deployed in the Province for over a year and will continue to be deployed there for as long as they are needed, despite the many other pressures on the armed forces.

But the resources that are needed go beyond manpower and equipment. The other side of our determination to defeat terrorism within the law is the need to provide the security forces with a legislative framework which gives them the powers they need to tackle terrorism effectively.

While on the subject of legislation, it is appropriate to pause briefly to note that Lord Colville's report on the operation in 1992 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act was published yesterday. The debates next month to consider the renewal of that Act will provide an opportunity to consider Lord Colville's report and the recommendations in more detail.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the great contribution that Lord Colville has made as a reviewer of the emergency legislation over the past seven years. His constructive and penetrating commentary and his contribution to the form that the legislation takes have been invaluable.

Our response to terrorism must and does include a recognition that terrorism can be brought to a permanent end only if security policy and security measures are complemented and reinforced by effective political, social and economic policies and programmes. Terrorist violence cannot be dealt with in isolation, because terrorism takes place not in a vacuum but in a society on whose political divisions the terrorists try to feed.

Our commitment to the defeat of terrorism, and to securing a just and tranquil future for the courageous people of Northern Ireland, is undiminished. I believe that the message is getting through to the terrorist godfathers on both sides that the security forces will continue to pursue them with unremitting resolution.

Mr. John D. Taylor: We have heard all this from the Government before. They have offered Northern Ireland nothing new this morning. The Minister's deplorable reply will increase the distaste for his system of government in Northern Ireland among the majority community. We were hoping for a change of direction in security policy, but nothing new has been announced. The message for the people of Northern Ireland is that they must continue to suffer at the hands of the IRA, who are now winning the battle.

Stobhill Hospital

11 am

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am grateful for the opportunity to talk about an important matter that affects my constituency. I thank the Minister for coming to reply on behalf of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Baroness Cumberlege; I also thank a consultant at the Stobhill hospital, Dr. Matthew Dunnigan, who helped me with my research, and Dr. Frank Dunn, who is a specialist at the hospital.

Last Sunday, an impressive gathering took place in the grounds of the hospital, which is in my constituency. Six thousand people assembled at 1 pm. They had one thing in common: they were all protesting at the possible closure of Stobhill. These were not the kind of protesters who normally become involved in rallies and demonstrations; they were simply men and women who live in my community and the neighbouring constituencies, and who use the hospital.

As I made my way to the demonstration, I was impressed by the number of friends and neighbours, including pensioners, who were heading for the hospital grounds. By any standards, it was a most impressive turnout. Those people spoke with one voice: they all said that they did not want the hospital to close. It was a massive gathering. At exactly 2 pm, they all linked hands and surrounded the hospital to show that they were not happy with what was proposed by the bureaucrats in the Scottish Office and Greater Glasgow health board. My thanks must go to Sam and Jeannette Watson for their excellent work in organising the demonstration.

I do not want Stobhill hospital to close. Everyone in the north end of Glasgow, and the surrounding areas, has a high regard for it; and I have a close link with it. My son Paul was born there, my daughter Mary was treated there not long ago, my wife—also called Mary—was treated there, and 10 years ago I received treatment. I can testify to the hospital's dedication: it is first class.

According to the Government, who have plucked an arbitrary figure out of the air, 1,000 beds must go in the Greater Glasgow area. The health board, however, seems determined to carry out the Government's wishes. As the Minister will know, every member of the board is hand-picked by the Government. Solid medical evidence from people who are highly regarded in the profession suggests that the loss of 1,000 beds will severely damage the health of local people.

Dr. Matthew Dunnigan, whom I mentioned earlier, presented a paper to the health board. As he explains, it is proposed to close Stobhill and amalgamate its service with that of the Royal Infirmary. Even if the Government were to do that tomorrow, the hospital would be needed for five to 10 years. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

There is talk in Government and health board circles of building a mega-hospital—an amalgamation of Stobhill and the Royal Infirmary. That would mean a reduced service for those who currently use the Royal Infirmary, which—in terms of discharges—is the second largest hospital in Scotland. Stobhill is the fifth largest. Those in the north end of Glasgow would be particularly affected by the resulting disruption. Moreover, although the amalgamation could not take place overnight, Stobhill would be expected to maintain its high standards despite the sentence hanging over it.

Dr. Dunnigan states:

"A combination of rising demand, current saturation of hospital bed capacity at peak demand and the absence of forward planning to provide compensating capacity in the community make it unlikely that there can be any significant reduction in Glasgow's bed capacity within 5 years and possibly within 10 years. However, Greater Glasgow Health Board . . . is under pressure from the Management Executive to announce plans to reduce bed capacity and to close two hospitals before funds are allocated for hospital redevelopment and rebuilding in the city.

It seems likely that GGHB will announce a strategy for acute beds within the next few months, possibly in June 1993. No hard information on a final decision is yet available but it seems probable that GGBH will opt for option (c) of their discussion document 'Review of Acute Services and Maternity Services to the Year 2001'. This will result in an announcement of the closure of Stobhill General Hospital and the amalgamation of the Victoria Infirmary and Southern General Hospitals on a single site. Hospital services will be concentrated on three sites in the Western/Gartnavel complex, the Royal Infirmary and in a combined hospital on the south side of the City.

As discussed in detail elsewhere, this scenario will not be in the best interests of Glasgow's hospital services and will run contrary to national trends in planning hospital services in the next century. The immediate result of a decision to close Stobhill General Hospital when circumstances permit will be to place a sentence of death over the Hospital. The Hospital is currently operating at full capacity and there is no prospect of Stobhill's present capacity being taken up . . . The combination of announcement to close the Hospital in the face of a continuing need for its services over this time scale will produce a potentially destabilising series of developments for the Hospital and its efficient functioning in relation to its catchment area.

Once the closure announcement is made public, all staff will immediately, in their best interests, seek to obtain employment elsewhere as and when the opportunity arises.

Employment will be easily obtained in shortage specialties such as Anaesthetics, Psychiatry and Geriatrics, and by highly trained senior technicians in laboratory specialties whose services are easily transferable. Hospital secretaries are in short supply and will also find it relatively easy to find alternative employment. Once the closure of the hospital is announced, suitable replacements will prove difficult to find, other than by locum appointments and poorly trained staff who cannot obtain employment elsewhere. Loss of staff and shortage medical and surgical specialties (already evident in the loss of a Senior Radiologist and an Anaesthetist) and natural wastage due to retirement, sickness and normal job turnover will make it progressively more difficult to find replacement staff in all categories. It would take only the loss of several key personnel in shortage specialties and laboratories to produce a situation in which the Hospital cannot offer an adequate or safe standard of care to its catchment area of 200,000. This potentially disastrous scenario is already the subject of widespread speculation in the Hospital.

The Hospital's difficulties in finding staff replacements will be compounded by the advent of self-governing hospital Trusts. Before the advent of Trusts it would have been possible to offer long-term security and redeployment in the Board's Hospitals or within the National Health Service in Scotland. Since there will be few or no directly managed hospitals within a relatively short space of time this prospect may be removed with the coming of self-governing Trusts who will have their own priorities and will be unwilling to guarantee employment for staff outwith their own hospitals. Thus, the coming of trusts will increase insecurity in Stobhill Hospital's medical, nursing and ancillary staff and accelerate their desire to find secure employment outside the hospital as soon as possible.

GGHB must ponder carefully the consequences of announcing the eventual closure of Stobhill Hospital while dependent on its efficient functioning for the next 5-10 years. The Hospital serves one fifth of the population of Glasgow and currently discharges 68 per cent. as many inpatients and 60 per cent. as many outpatients as the Royal Infirmary. The

Royal Infirmary is totally unprepared to cope with this demand in the foreseeable future if Stobhill's capacity to manage is compromised by an exodus of key staff.

A similar situation may be created by the announced amalgamation of the Victoria Infirmary and Southern General Hospital since rationalisation may be required at all grades of medical, nursing and administrative staff in the combined hospital. The prospects of staff losses with a failure to recruit suitable applicants will make the prospects for the effective staffing and management of all three Glasgow hospitals in the short and medium term highly uncertain."

Dr. Dunnigan makes four points in summary:

"Demand for acute hospital beds in Greater Glasgow Health Board continues to rise each year. On present evidence, based on trends analysis for acute medical and surgical specialties, the claim that 30 per cent. fewer acute beds will be required by the end of the century is difficult to sustain.

At present, there is no evidence of significant under-use of acute hospital beds in Glasgow hospitals. On the contrary, bed capacity in most acute specialties is fully occupied at times of peak demand. With pressure on beds, difficulty in accommodating patients at such times is leading to patient inconvenience and distress and impeding their efficient management.

District General Hospitals of moderate size such as Stobhill General Hospital (about 500 beds) provide optimum geographical and functional relationships with primary care and community services in catchment areas which do not exceed 200-250,000 and should not be closed. Stobhill hospital is currently working at full capacity with winter bed occupancy rates approaching 100 per cent.

For a city of Greater Glasgow's size, tertiary (supra-area specialty) referral services and the University's clinical academic unit should be concentrated on a single site to reduce the present dispersion of the scarce resources on several sites in the city and create the potential for a 'centre of excellence' in post-graduate teaching and research."

Dr. Robbie Robertson, the representative of Springburn health centre, supports Dr. Dunnigan's view. Dr. Robertson and his staff, including clerical and auxiliary staff and GPs, marched from Springburn health centre last Sunday to join the campaign at Stobhill. Dr. Robertson states that his centre alone has 30,000 patients, many of whom live in highly deprived areas, and there is an aging population in his catchment area. He has nothing but praise for the service that is given by Stobhill hospital to the health centre and GPs operating in the area. He says that laboratory specimens are lifted twice daily and that, if they reveal abnormal results, consultants will, if necessary, offer advice on the same day. There is a special coronary care hot line between the centre and the hospital, which has saved many lives.

I mentioned the aging population. Geriatricians in Stobhill have a feel for the community. Consultants and GPs have an excellent relationship. Adjoining the grounds at Stobhill hospital is Hunters Hill hospice, an excellent hospice, with which the Minister will be familiar, that is run by the Marie Curie organisation. I have visited it several times, and it must offer the finest care in Scotland for cancer patients. It depends heavily on assistance that is given by Stobhill hospital. If it were to lose Stobhill, it certainly would experience many difficulties.

The hospital, as the Minister knows, has 600 general beds and 174 long-stay geriatric patients. It serves 200,000 people in the north of Glasgow in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). It also serves the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) and for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg). It reaches out to widespread rural areas. It is also used to teach medical students from Glasgow university.

There are pockets of severe poverty in my constituency. As the Minister knows, poverty leads to a higher incidence of heart disease, chronic chest complaints and, unfortunately, drug abuse, which can cause terrible side effects that only a hospital can seek to repair.

I wonder about the Government's argument that there are too many beds, especially when one expert at Stobhill states:

"On many occasions this last winter elderly patients with medical conditions have been transferred to surgical wards or even by taxi to other hospitals to make way for the winter peak of admissions. Consultant medical staff and hospital management have walked the wards together. They looked for patients who were in hospital but should be at home. They found almost none. On this audit, Stobhill needs the beds it has to meet the needs of a particularly needy population."

The Tomlinson report on London stated that hospitals should be located where people live, not in the city centre but out in the community. In that case, why are there proposals for mega hospitals in Glasgow when the population has moved out of the centre and has been doing so since the 1950s? The Minister will know that his own constituency has expanded immensely, especially the districts of Newton Mearns and Giffnock, due to the arrival of people who formerly lived on the south side and in the centre of Glasgow but have moved out to the areas that he represents.

In the old days hospitals were in the centre of cities because that was where the population lived. However, we are keeping hospitals there although the population has moved out. There is no economic argument for that, although economics is the case usually put forward by the Government. Every Minister, including the Under-Secretary, speaks about costs, but it is cheaper to keep and care for patients at Stobhill than at the Royal Infirmary or the Western Infirmary. The population of Bishopbriggs is expanding and the population in my constituency is increasing due to a great deal of redevelopment.

There is a similarity between our previous housing problems and the problems that we are now experiencing in the health service. When Springburn had terrible redevelopment problems, it was known as planning blight. Shopkeepers would not invest in their shops because they did not know what would happen in the future. Young people moved out because the factor would not carry out property repairs as he did not know whether there was to be redevelopment. The young people moved to Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and East Kilbride. There was a general blight over the area because people were uncertain about its future.

That blight is now coming to Stobhill because people there are uncertain. As Dr. Dunnigan said, if bright and talented people are uncertain about their present place of employment and are offered a more secure job in a hospital that is not the subject of such speculation, they will move on. The Minister knows that that can lead to difficulties.

I cannot see the case for closing a hospital that is highly efficient and sits in the most beautiful grounds overlooking the Campsie hills. It provides a very pleasant environment for people in need of care and attention and in which to work. I mean no disrespect to the Royal Infirmary but, as the Minister knows, the buildings are old with little room for expansion. Any expansion would be expensive because of the historical nature of some of the buildings. However, there is plenty of room for expansion at Stobhill. I hope

[Mr. Michael J. Martin]

that the Minister will give me, the community and the dedicated staff of Stobhill some hope for the future because the speculation has led to a sad state of affairs.

I also hope that the Minister will bear in mind the fact that medical evidence suggests that the loss of 1,000 beds in Glasgow would be damaging. There is also concern that the people making the decisions about the future of Stobhill are the political appointees of a Government who, admittedly, went to the people on the basis of cuts in public expenditure. Nevertheless, there is some distrust of people who have been appointed by the Government and who have the same political leanings. Perhaps it would be better if Greater Glasgow, like London, were the subject of an independent public inquiry into hospital and medical needs. Everyone in the community is worried about the hospital.

My neighbour, Sophie Anderson, aged eight, was so impressed by the demonstration on Sunday that she sent me a poem for the debate. It is called "Stobhill Hospital" and reads:

"Today we stand around Stobhill
To try to stop it closing,
We want to let the people know exactly
What they're losing.
I think it would be a terrible shame
Because lots of people use it.
We want the Health Board our plea to hear
Keep it open, don't close it!"

11.27 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Springburn (Mr. Martin) on securing the Adjournment debate and on speaking with his customary knowledge and eloquence on a matter that is undoubtedly of great importance to his constituents. As *Hansard* will attest, he has asked about the future of Stobhill more than once during Scottish Question Time. I shall try to answer his questions but I hope that he will understand that I am not in a position today to make any announcements about its future.

There is no formal proposal from the health board to Ministers about the future of Stobhill or any hospital in Glasgow. The board is conducting a review of its future requirements for acute beds and their distribution throughout the city. That process is well advanced but it will be a while before the board is able to put firm proposals to Ministers and some time thereafter before final decisions can be taken.

However, I repeat my pledge to the hon. Gentleman that before any final decisions are taken my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister of State will be happy to discuss the issues fully with him and other hon. Members involved.

Let me describe some of the background. The final decision on closures or major changes in the pattern of health services is a matter for Ministers, and I must re-emphasise that no decisions have been taken about Stobhill or any other hospital in Glasgow.

The hon. Gentleman referred to investment and the use of public resources. It is perhaps worth emphasising that over the past 10 years or so the hospital capital building programme for acute services has been directed at building district general hospitals outside the main centres of population.

The past 10 to 15 years have seen major hospitals in, for example, Dumfries, Inverness and Melrose—the list is quite long. The Princess Royal will be opening the new Queen Market hospital in Dunfermline at the end of next month and new hospitals are under construction in Oban and Campbeltown. I must resist boring the hon. Gentleman by continuing, there simply is not time to list all the new developments.

Since taking office, the Government have spent more than £512 million on 91 major national health service capital investment projects in Scotland; 21 of those projects, totalling £86 million, were in Glasgow.

As I have said before, that programme of creating new district hospitals outside the main centres of population is coming to an end. We now need to turn our attention to the main centres of population, where the acute hospitals are generally old and in an unsatisfactory condition. Our first priority for the remainder of the decade is to create modern and efficient acute hospitals in our main centres of population to produce a pattern of acute care which best meets the needs of our population.

The hon. Gentleman and I agree that it is vital that we get the process right. I shall now respond to his more detailed points by setting out the factors that we need to take into account and explaining why we believe that the number of acute hospital in-patient beds will fall.

There are four main factors which will influence the number of acute hospital beds that we shall need in future: first, the number of patients who need to be treated as hospital in-patients; secondly, how long they stay in hospital as in-patients; thirdly, the efficiency with which acute hospitals use the beds available to them; and fourthly, how medicine and surgery will be delivered in future. Those factors were at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's argument and I shall deal with them in turn.

Since the mid-1970s, the number of patients treated by the acute services has increased from around 615,000 to nearly 870,000—the hon. Gentleman referred to the figure for Stobhill. That represents an average annual growth of 2·3 per cent. and that figure has not changed very much over the years.

Increasingly, not all patients will be treated as hospital in-patients. Within the overall figures that I have quoted, there has been a marked shift towards treating patients as day cases. In 1975-76, only 8·3 per cent. of patients were treated as day cases. By 1990-91 that proportion had increased to nearly 18 per cent., and it will not stop there, as recent studies by the Audit Commission and the Scottish Office Audit Unit have predicted. They found that the use of day surgery is well below its estimated potential and concluded that up to 30,000 additional cases a year are possible for the 20 procedures covered by the study. That represents a 90 per cent. increase on current levels.

We expect health boards and hospitals to expand considerably the use made of day case treatment and that it might be possible to increase the number of cases by at least 75,000 over the next few years. I believe that that trend will be generally welcomed.

The shift away from hospital in-patient treatment or treatment by general practitioner is not about saving money; it is in the best interests of patients. It means that the medical or surgical treatment that the patient receives is less drastic. That reflects medical advances.

Mr. Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh, Leith): The Minister is making a lot of the increasing number of day cases. How does he know that the trend will continue? Has he carried out surveys about whether patients want such treatment and has he studied issues such as the higher rate of post-operative infection in day-case patients and the increased numbers that have to be re-admitted? If he is supporting the trend towards day cases, is he putting more money into care in the community?

Mr. Stewart: As I have told the House, the basis of my case is the recent studies by the Audit Commission and the Scottish Office Audit Unit. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's second question, we have indeed substantially increased resources for care in the community. The shift to local authorities has been accompanied by considerable increases for care in the community.

I now turn to length of stay. For some of the reasons that I have just mentioned, the average length of stay for those patients who have to be hospital in-patients has also declined dramatically. In the mid-1970s the mean length of stay for all acute specialties was 10·7 days. By 1990-91, that had fallen to 6·7 days and it continues to fall.

In our planning we have assumed that length of stay will continue to fall, but at a slower rate than in the past. We have assumed an annual rate of 2 per cent.—a cautious assumption compared with the recent rate of more than 4 per cent. I accept that the figures that I am quoting are averages and will vary in different parts of the country. The hon. Member for Springburn was quite right to mention that there are problems of deprivation in some areas of Glasgow and that may well mean that planning has to assume a slightly longer length of stay than in other areas. However, that has been taken into account in our planning.

I now turn to occupancy rates. Acute hospital beds have an occupancy rate of just over 70 per cent. With the move to hospital trusts and the associated increase in efficiency, it is reasonable to assume that that figure will rise to about 80 per cent. Again, that is an overall average.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Stewart: I want to answer the points raised by the hon. Member for Springburn, but I shall give way.

Mrs. Mahon: The Minister said that there could be a dramatic increase in occupancy. Have the Government made any estimate of the number of staff that would be needed to cope with that increase?

Mr. Stewart: First, may I warmly welcome the hon. Lady's intervention in a Scottish debate. Of course, the House will generally appreciate the fact that this is a United Kingdom Parliament, and we are all delighted that the hon. Lady, who represents an English constituency, has taken the opportunity to avail herself of her right, as a Member of the United Kingdom Parliament, to intervene in a Scottish debate. I warmly welcome the assertion from the Opposition Benches that this is a United Kingdom Parliament.

Mrs. Mahon: I am half Scottish, actually.

Mr. Stewart: Indeed, but the point is that the hon. Lady is here in the House as a Member of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. I pay tribute to her for asserting her right, as an English Member, to intervene in a Scottish debate.

Secondly, in answer to the hon. Lady's detailed question, what I was saying did not have staffing implications. I was emphasising the fact that at the moment acute hospital beds have an occupancy rate of just over 70 per cent., and that, irrespective of staff numbers, we believe that increased efficiency could increase that figure to 80 per cent.

When we consider medical advances, we sometimes assume that medicine and surgery will be delivered in the future in pretty much the same way as they are delivered now. That assumption seems increasingly questionable. Because of the advent of, for example, keyhole surgery, and the work of leading authorities such as Professor Alfred Cuscherri of Dundee university, patients recover much faster. The implication of that is that lengths of stay in hospital will fall quite sharply.

What do all those factors, taken together, mean for the planning of acute hospitals? Our best guess is that the need for acute in-patient beds across the whole of Scotland will fall by 3,000 to 5,000 by the end of the decade. I can reassure the hon. Member for Springburn that those figures have been discussed with many people in the medical profession. Of course, what I have said does not mean that fewer patients will be treated. We have assumed that the number of patients treated in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and elsewhere will continue to grow by between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. a year.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Does the Minister still maintain that 1,000 beds must be lost in the Greater Glasgow catchment area?

Mr. Stewart: The figure of 1,000 or so was arrived at through various planning models. It has been discussed and generally agreed with many clinicians through the internal consultation process, and it is in line with the overall Scottish figure to which I have referred.

In the two minutes or so remaining to me, I emphasise that the whole exercise is not about saving money—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) laughs, as part of her continued and welcome intervention in Scottish debates. But the exercise is not about reducing the scale of the national health service in the sense of treating fewer patients; it is about getting the size of the hospital sector right so that resources are not wasted on providing in-patient beds when they could be better used —for example, by providing day surgery facilities, by supporting the development of primary care, by providing high-technology operating theatres to allow minimal access surgery, or by doing a dozen other things that will provide a better service to patients than providing hospital beds that are simply not needed.

The cost of achieving those better services will be high. We are talking about investment in new and improved hospitals in Glasgow, which will cost between £200 million and £400 million. The easy option would be to leave everything unchanged. That would save the Government money. It would not only be cheaper, it would avoid a lot of fuss and bother, but I emphasise to the hon. Member for Springburn that that would not be the way forward.

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Clearly a major reshuffle of the high offices of state is taking place at this moment. I understand that the former Home Secretary is to become Chancellor——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is in no way a matter for the Chair.

Mrs. Mahon: I just wondered, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair.

Night Flights (Heathrow)

11.45 am

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the question of night flights at Heathrow. This is part of a wider problem of aircraft noise. Aircraft noise is a curse and a pestilence. It ruins people's quiet enjoyment of their homes, especially in spring and summer, when they are more likely to have a larger proportion of their windows open. It interferes with people's private lives, with their telephone conversations and with their opportunity to listen to records or to television. It spoils their pleasure in their gardens; it interrupts the work of schools, hospitals, churches and offices. It can even interfere with people's sleep at night. That is the main subject of my debate.

It must be said that there are some people who do not mind aircraft noise very much. But to a large proportion of the people living around Heathrow—perhaps 1 million people—it is a considerable nuisance. To many people it is a major nuisance. To some it causes actual suffering and even mental ill health, as has been shown in research by the West Middlesex University hospital. That is especially true of night noise disturbance.

There are already 1,000 flights per day at Heathrow, so that at times aircraft come over every two minutes. It is not enough to say, as British Airways and the airports authority do, that there should be "no increase" in noise. The present noise level is unacceptable. My constituents and others around Heathrow require a substantial and permanent reduction in the volume of noise. It is not enough to say, as the consultation document says, that the noise problem should merely get no worse.

People can look to courts of law for protection against other forms of noise nuisance, but in the Civil Aviation Act 1949 Parliament expressly ruled out that protection in the case of aircraft and helicopter noise. That being so, people can do no other than look to the Government and to Parliament for protection against the nuisance of noise which, in other cases, is enshrined in English law. The Government, therefore, have a special duty to have regard to the impact of aircraft noise on householders, as does Parliament.

There is no subject on which I have had more letters from my constituents who are resident in Twickenham, Teddington, the Hamptons and Whitton. But it is not confined to my constituency. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) and many other hon. Members in west London will bear out what I say. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), a Minister from another Department who therefore will not speak in this debate but who is here today, is also lending his support by being present. He has his own channels by which he can make his views known, and I have not the slightest doubt that he has already done so with considerable force. His concern is shared by the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), the Minister for Housing, Planning and Construction, and by all right hon. and hon. Conservative Members who are present.

The Conservative Government's record in the field of aircraft noise has so far been really rather good. In 1985, the late Lord Ridley, then Secretary of State, refused

planning permission for a fifth terminal at Heathrow. When the M25 motorway was built, he stopped the Heathrow to Gatwick helicopter link as some of us had asked. Over the years, some—I repeat, some—quieter aircraft engines have been brought in and, up until now, the Government have curbed any increase in the number of night flights. Lord Ridley and Lord Parkinson as Secretaries of State for Transport did so, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind). All of them consistently refused to increase the quota for night flights above the average of 16 per night for the summer

In the face of enormous commercial pressure, those Secretaries of State were absolutely right to be firm, resolute and strict in protecting the people on the western side of London from any increase in night flights. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London, who will reply to the debate, will reassure me that the present Secretary of State will not weaken and will be equally strong in protecting the people. If he does not, I for one will take an extremely dim view and so, I believe, will my right hon. and hon. Friends and large numbers of people in all the constituencies on the western side of London.

The peace, the quiet and the health of millions of people must be placed above commercial interests. It is absolutely intolerable to contemplate that thousands and thousands of people might be woken up at night for the convenience of a few hundred travellers in aeroplanes above. My constituents simply will not accept it. They are angry at the very thought of it. What they want is a total ban on all night flights except in emergencies. I hope that the Government will listen carefully, pay heed to what my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are saying and take a robust view. After all, there are only 16 night flights per night now and even if that number were doubled, with 1,000 flights every day, it would only increase the total number of flights through Heathrow by 1·5 per cent. Yet it would be doubling the number at night.

If people wake up for any reason in the middle of night, perhaps because they have overeaten and are suffering from indigestion or because they want to go round the corner, they then go to bed again. They may have been worrying about something and then, just as they are drowsing off to sleep, an aeroplane—a so-called "quiet" aeroplane—comes over. That will wake them up again and they may not be able to get back to sleep for an hour or so. If they have read that the Government have allowed an increase in the number of night flights, they will blame the Government for the fact that they cannot get to sleep—and that will be a perfectly reasonable assumption for them to make.

Millions of people throughout the country suffer from the effects of aircraft noise, but none suffer more than those on the west side of London. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be absolutely firm in resisting any increase in the number of night flights. Indeed, I hope that there will be a total ban on all night flights except in emergencies.

11.55 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie) are hoping to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall be brief. I am grateful to you for calling me, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) for securing the debate, which is extremely valuable—indeed, crucial—to the people of west London.

In referring to the interests of the people of west London, I shall bear my own constituents most particularly in mind. I am sorry to say that air pollution in Ealing is among the most serious in the country. Ealing is a beautiful place and is rightly known as the queen of the suburbs. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am grateful to my hon. Friends. Air pollution is serious in Ealing mainly because aircraft flying overhead pollute the atmosphere and because of the huge amounts of traffic that are sucked through my constituency because of its proximity to the airport, from which people want to catch aircraft to fly to various parts of the world. Add to that air pollution the serious noise pollution from which my constituents suffer by day—and which they could suffer by night—and the House will see why I am so keen to support my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent constituencies in west London.

At present there is an almost universal ban on night flights and it is important that that should not be relaxed in any way. The Local Authorities Aircraft Noise Council, which represents all local councils in the areas surrounding Heathrow, is firmly opposed to any relaxation of the ban, but the consultation paper recently issued by the Department of Transport implies that, as most aircraft are now quieter, a relaxation of the present restrictions on night flights would be justified. It is certainly true that the latest generation of aircraft are considerably quieter than the earlier jets, and successive Conservative Governments must take credit for that. With the strong support of its members, the European Commission, too, has been heavily involved in persuading manufacturers to introduce quieter planes—indeed, that is one of the good things that the Commission has done.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that people would be seriously disturbed at night if the present night flight ban were relaxed in any way, and such a relaxation would bring justifiable fury to my constituency. Why should the people of west London be disturbed in this way? The House will understand why I am so keen for the night flight ban to be retained. If there is anyone in the land who takes seriously the suggestion in the White Paper that people may not be disturbed by certain aircraft, I should like to meet him. I do not think that anyone who studies the question in any depth can take seriously the argument that aircraft can be made so quiet that they will not disturb people at night. That simply can never be true. However quiet aircraft become, people will always be disturbed by them. It is bad enough for that to happen by day, but it would be totally unacceptable for it to happen at night. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham in respect of a relaxation of the ban on night flights.

11.59 am

Mr. David Mellor (Putney): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) for giving us the opportunity to debate this matter today. He has been absolutely tireless in his pursuit of this issue in the nigh on 20 years that he has represented his constituency.

Mr. Jessel: Twenty three years.

Mr. Mellor: Well, there you are.

My hon. Friend pursues this matter not through a fixation with the issue, but because his constituents demand it. It would be absolutely impossible for him and for some of us to represent our constituencies if we did not take the view that we do, so all-pervasive is the concern about the issue. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London will be aware of that.

It is significant that we have gathered here this morning, not the usual lonely vigil of the initiator of the Adjournment debate, the Minister and the poor old Whip, but several other hon. Members because this is such a significant and substantial matter. It is particularly noteworthy that my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) is present. Although he is a Minister and unable to speak in this debate, I know that he passionately believes that enough is enough in respect of Heathrow airport.That is the cause that we advance today.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London—this is not empty piety on my part because I am not terribly good at empty piety—that I pay him a genuine tribute because this very week he has announced an extremely politically sensitive decision in my constituency when he rejected plans to expand the A3 beyond the Robin Hood roundabout although being under great pressure from the roads lobby to do that.

My hon. Friend the Minister decided to reject the scheme because he knows full well that the political controversy which the scheme would engender does not make the project worth while. It is therefore a pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Minister in the Chamber today because I am sure that the same considerations will weigh heavily with him when he broods on this particular matter.

I believe that our case can be stated simply. Heathrow airport is one of the great airports of the world. Whatever the extent of the suffering that it causes to local communities represented by my hon. Friends who are here today, and by others who cannot be here, we all recognise the pressures on my hon. Friend the Minister from the airline companies, the British Airports Authority and others to ensure that Heathrow keeps that competitive edge.

I recall Douglas Jay once telling me how Heathrow was set up. One afternoon towards the end of the war, a few civil servants decided that that marshy place on the wrong side of London should be Heathrow airport. How very differently things are done today, when we can spend 30 years deciding, through endless public inquiries, whether something should be built.

Mr. Jessel: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that those civil servants in that room after the war, who took that decision without reference to Parliament, could never have foreseen the massive growth in demand for air travel or the development of noisy jet engines?

Mr. Mellor: I suppose that if they foresaw anything I would probably be a good deal less cynical about the whole process of decision making. Let us assume that they thought about things carefully, even if that assumption is misguided.

The plain fact is that Heathrow exists. It is a great airport. We all use it and I have nothing against its excellent facilities. However, the communities of south-west London suffer intolerably because of the airport. The appropriate way to consider aircraft policy is to say that we all have the benefits of air travel and we should all share the suffering. We cannot have more suffering lumped on to the communities around Heathrow when Stansted was supposed to be London's third airport, although there is precious little sign of that, when there is Gatwick and when the regional airports are getting down on their knees to beg for more business.

Night flights are a thorough nuisance. I live happily—or not as the case may be—in that part of my constituency that is overflown by aircraft coming in, so I am not raising an academic matter in the House. Every morning, I get it. If my humble home were big enough, any number of civil servants from the Department of Transport could come and share that night-time vigil so as to be acquainted with what it is like.

I do not want to take up time that we do not have. It is clear that the Government, under pressure from the industry, are floating a proposition that is not acceptable or saleable and will have to be rejected. The proposition is that there is such a thing as a quiet or non-intrusive aircraft. That is nonsense. There are, however, quieter aircraft. I am grateful for the efforts that Governments have made over the years to prohibit the noisy clapped-out old 707s of emergent African dictatorships from coming into Heathrow. That has all been stopped—and a jolly good thing too.

The mere fact that some aircraft are quieter than others does not mean that we live in the world of the quiet aircraft. There is no such thing as a quiet aircraft. The assumption which underpins the document produced by the Department of Transport is that, if further pressure is exerted on noisy aircraft, our communities will accept that two or three quiet aircraft are worth one noisy aircraft, and even erect a statue in the centre of Putney, Richmond or Twickenham to the beneficent Secretary of State for Transport who has given them three times as many quiet planes. That is nonsense and it would be helpful, especially in the Government's present state, if that nonsense were realised before rather than after any blood needs to be shed. On that basis, I make this genial speech today.

12.6 pm

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) for securing this debate and the speeches that have been made. The key point for my hon. Friend the Minister to bear in mind is that in no way has the case been made for any change in the present situation. A ridiculous and thin piece of research has been done into sleep patterns. If the Department wants to do something proper in that area, it could revisit that whole question and do a proper study over a long period. But nowhere to my knowledge has the commercial case been made by any of the airlines for any relaxation in the current regime. It would be interesting to speculate that, if the British

Airports Authority believed that relaxation in the regulations was an absolute sine qua non before they began the procedure for terminal 5, they would not be spending tens of millions of pounds going through application and planning procedures for that development and all of the surface access that is needed.

Hon. Members whose constituents are most seriously affected by the proposals want to see at least the maintenance of the existing regime. We would like to see monitoring equipment for landings put sensibly into position. In the past, the emphasis has been on monitoring take-offs, not landings. A lot of research needs to be done so that the Government can be satisfied that any proposals that they may bring forward in the future could possibly command an element of acceptance. These proposals would command no support whatever in our constituencies.

I echo the appeal of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) that in the present state of affairs it might be wise for the Government to take the sagacious view of spending a little more time cogitating and working out what would be acceptable, bearing in mind the fundamental point that quality of life is important to our constituents and should be weighed at least equally with the commercial development of the airport.

12.9 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) on raising an issue of vital importance to anyone who lives in the west of London. It affects my constituents as much as those of all my hon. Friends who are present and many who would have liked to be here today to debate this important issue.

My constituency is slightly further from Heathrow than other constituencies, but that is not to underestimate the disturbance caused by flights to and from the airport. The disturbance is serious. I associate myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friends this morning. My constituents are worried about the proposals, especially the proposal to increase the number of night flights into Heathrow.

It is clear that sleep patterns are seriously disturbed by night flights. They are disturbed by the current number of night flights. To suggest that quieter aeroplanes disturb less is perhaps true if windows are double glazed and it is not the summer months when windows are left open. Through great parts of the year, my constituents like to sleep with their windows open. They like to benefit from the fresh air and enjoy the pleasures of bird song in the early morning.

A quiet plane going over in a background of relative silence in London at night is as disturbing to the sleep of my constituents as a noisy plane going over. Whatever the cause, if people are woken from their sleep, especially in the early hours of the morning, they find it difficult to go back to sleep again. So the suggestion that many more quieter planes equal one noisy plane is so ludicrous as to have brought into question the basis upon which the consideration document issued by the Department of Transport was produced. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will therefore review that document and consider whether it would be appropriate to reject its suggestions. I hope that he will also reconsider night flights into and out of Heathrow. As my hon. Friends have said, our constituents are perhaps prepared to tolerate the status quo, but that does not mean that the status quo is acceptable.

Ideally, the current number of night flights into Heathrow, especially early morning flights, would be reduced. As has already been said, the expansion of Heathrow is unnecessary, given the alternative airports into which those flights could go. I should like the Department of Transport to give that serious consideration. I should also like the overall study to include overflying of our constituents by helicopters. Helicopter flights are a particular problem in my constituency, as in any constituency along the River Thames. Helicopter flights are as much a nuisance—indeed, sometimes more of a nuisance—as other flights. They are controlled, but they are not controlled as effectively as they should be.

A great deal more could be said on this subject. I do not want to take up any more time because I want to give my hon. Friend the Minister ample time to answer the real anxieties of my constituents and those of my hon. Friends and to explain exactly how he intends to ensure that my constituents get a good night's sleep.

12.13 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) on securing the debate. I have been left in no doubt whatever about the strength of feeling among my right hon. and hon. Friends on this important issue.

If it is not too churlish, I should like to make one point at the start of my reply. We had excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Twickenham, for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and for Fulham (Mr. Carrington), my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton (Sir G. Pattie). My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) is also in his place. Sadly, that is it. With the honourable exception of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who has an interest in this matter as well as being a member of the Government Whips Office, not one Labour or Liberal Member is in the Chamber to discuss this important issue. I have heard about pavement politics, particularly from some Liberal councillors who make so much of their interest in such politics in some parts of the city, so why is it that not one of their representatives was able to be present for this important debate?

Mr. Mellor: Had I thought that I had a minute or two longer in which to speak, I might have dilated on the point which my hon. Friend has properly raised. It is even worse than my hon. Friend suggests, as those of us with long memories will know. The late Stephen Ross, whose death saddened me because he was a nice man, although I did not agree with everything he said, helped to prevent the passage of an aviation Bill that we attempted to get through the House. That Bill was designed to restrict the number of flights into and out of Heathrow, but it was aborted because of the efforts of Liberal and Labour Members and, sadly, one or two Conservative Back Benchers. The Liberals speak with a forked tongue on this matter because they say one thing in Parliament while

[Mr. Mellor]

trying to assert other things in the affected communities, where they try to pretend that they are on the side of those who are concerned about the Heathrow expansion.

Mr. Norris: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that information. Let us not dwell on that rather sad aspect of the debate, but let us concentrate on the substantive issue.

I should set in context what the consultation exercise is all about. Five objectives lie behind the new proposals. First, they are designed to revise and update the current restrictions to take into account the types of aircraft that are flying today—or, if I may say so, tonight—and to encourage airlines to choose the quietest possible types of aircraft for their operations. That is the most important principle. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney is right, of course, that there is no such thing as a silent aircraft, but he was generous enough to acknowledge that technical progress has been made. It is therefore obviously important that, whatever regulations might be appropriate in the future, we should take into account that technical progress.

It is also important to bear in mind that the need for the consultation exercise stems from the fact that, unless new restrictions are in place, the existing ones will lapse at the end of the summer season—technically, on 24 October. It is therefore important that that exercise should take place.

The second purpose of the new proposals is to introduce common principles for arrangements for night restrictions at the three major London airports. The third objective is to honour our commitment in the 1985 White Paper, "Airports Policy", to establish further night restrictions at Stansted. The fourth important objective is to continue to protect local communities from excessive aircraft noise levels at night. The fifth objective is to ensure that the competitive influences affecting United Kingdom airports and airlines and the wider employment and economic implications are taken into account. That is the background to the consultation exercise.

My colleagues who are present are experienced Members of the House and I am sure that they will understand what I am about to say. The underlying objective must be to try to strike a reasonable balance between the needs of the commercial operators at Heathrow and the needs and concerns of those who live around the airport and who are anxious about its operations.

Let us be in no doubt that Heathrow is a major national asset. It continues to be the largest international airport in the world. In the past 12 months it has catered for more than 45 million passengers. Perhaps more importantly, it serves as the workplace for some 50,000 people directly and for at least 20,000 others indirectly in terms of facilitating passenger, freight and postal services.

I believe that not only hon. Members but the vast majority of people, not just in London but in the United Kingdom, accept that Heathrow is of immense strategic importance to the nation. Against that has to be balanced the needs of the local community and the need to protect it from the excesses of night flying beyond the limit of that which is tolerable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North started with the correct observation that noise is a pollutant. It is as much a pollutant as any pollutant. The purpose of the proposals is to encourage quieter aircraft, and that encourages those aircraft that are more fuel efficient and produce less particulant emission. Therefore, there is that incidental benefit to be derived from a better night noise regime.

Mr. Jessel: No one questions the tremendous importance of Heathrow to Britain, to our national economy, to trade, industry, tourism and to London's position in the world. All of that is practically self-evident. But why cannot the work of the large number of people whose employment depends upon it be concentrated, as far as possible, by day and not at all by night?

Mr. Norris: I was about to come to that precise point, which is obviously germane to the debate. Let us start with the straightforward proposition that I believe my hon. Friends will accept, which is that the vast majority of flights take place during day-time hours. We are talking very much about flights on the margin. The new proposed definition of night time runs from 11 pm until 7 am and the new quota system from 11.30 pm to 6 am.

The purpose of that—the difference between the definition of night time and the quota regime—is to allow a buffer during which no noisy aircraft can be scheduled and therefore eliminate the risk that aircraft which would otherwise be scheduled close to the point at which the night quota regime came into effect might, for operational reasons, stray into the night quota regime, thus vitiating the purpose of having a quota regime in place. That is a sensible move. Harmonisation on the question of hours makes a great deal of sense.

I am clear that we should be sure that those movements which are allowed to operate at night are justified in terms of their strategic and economic importance to Heathrow. My hon. Friend makes the perfectly fair point that we should apply some fairly stringent tests to any proposals for night flying.

I am mindful of the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chertsey and Walton on sleep research. I appreciate that neither he nor others in the House may have treated that work with the seriousness that it deserves. The research has been carried out by teams led by Professor Jim Horne from Loughborough university and others from Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Southampton under the overall direction of Dr. John Ollerhead of the Civil Aviation Authority's department of safety, environment and engineering. It is a creditable piece of research into a most difficult subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham is right. One may wake up in the middle of the night because, as in my hon. Friend's case, one is suffering from dyspepsia. My other right hon. and hon. Friends may do so because, as they are all distinguished chaps, they are worried about the possibility of the telephone ringing the next morning—particularly on a day such as this—or of it not ringing, which might cause even more sleeplessness. Whatever the reason, it is difficult to get back to sleep, and in those circumstances even so-called quiet aircraft can be an absolute bane. I spend my week in central London, as do most right hon. and hon. Members, so I have some experience of night aircraft noise, although I cannot claim that it is particularly upsetting.

Mr. Harry Greenway: It is an important part of our case that some people are such light sleepers that they

wake up at the slightest sound, be it aircraft noise or anything else. We cannot put the whole of west London on sleeping pills.

Mr. Norris: I believe that my hon. Friend is supporting me. If I am wrong, I apologise—but it would be characteristic of him, as a generous hon. Friend, to be supportive.

Some people are extremely light sleepers and almost anything will wake them, but it would be unreasonable to take measures to control such an important activity as international flights into our major airport on the basis that every person in this city must be guaranteed uninterrupted slumber. I look forward to the day when every resident of the metropolis enjoys an uninterrupted night's slumber, but I doubt that I shall live to see it.

It is important not to confuse annoyance with disburbance. We all get annoyed at different things. The research had the serious purpose of distinguishing between annoyance and disturbance. There is a threshold at which a person is awoken from his or her normal sleep pattern. When that level of noise is reached, we are in important territory that is quite different from the sort of background noise that is part of every major city.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney represents a most attractive part of London, but it is not immune from other noises—if only that associated with the festivities and general merrymaking that my right hon. and learned Friend has done so much to promote in his years as Putney's Member of Parliament.

I will conclude with a serious point. I know that my right hon. and hon. Friends accept that it is a question of striking the right balance. I make it clear that the proposal is not something new in terms of permitting night flying but relates to extending the controls over night flying which currently exist to protect residents. It is perfectly open to right hon. and hon. Members to complain that that control is currently not sufficiently stringent. I undertake to bear their comments in mind very carefully —but the Government, in acting responsibly, must bear in mind the balance of advantage which must lie between Heathrow's promotion as a vital part of our economic, tourism and business infrastructure and the rights and needs of local residents.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is most concerned about the representations that he received. I will certainly study them closely to ensure that proper weight is placed on all the arguments that my right hon. and hon. Friends adduced. They have left me in no doubt about the importance that they attach to the issue. Let us hope that, when the new arrangements are finalised, we shall strike the desired balance, benefiting all interested parties—enabling Heathrow to take its rightful place as the world's premier international airport, and allowing our constituents to enjoy a reasonable night's sleep.

Fire Service

12.29 pm

Ms Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am grateful for this timely opportunity to raise important issues relating to the fire service.

No doubt the Minister was among the many Members of Parliament approached yesterday by a large lobby organised by the Fire Brigades Union and attended by many firefighters and ambulance and emergency rescue staff. I am grateful to him for representing the Minister of State, Earl Ferrers. He and I are much more used to corresponding regularly on immigration matters: I would guess that he receives more letters and representations from Members of Parliament than any other member of the Government. I am glad that he has been able to drag himself away from pressing matters in his office; no doubt they are even more pressing than usual this morning.

I wish to concentrate largely on the turmoil surrounding the threat to the firefighters' pay review formula, agreed after the damaging strike of 1977. However, I shall also press the Minister on some of the technical issues that I raised in an Adjournment debate on the emergency services in London some 18 months ago. I hope that he will be able to demonstrate that some progress has been made, although I must admit to a certain scepticism which I hope that he will be able to overturn.

The 1977 fire service strike evokes in all of us powerful memories of service men and women providing a vital emergency service, and of "green goddesses" on the streets of our towns and cities. The current dispute has brought us lively television footage of that period, dubbed with assurances that, if necessary, the Army fire tenders will be taken out of their mothballs and made ready for action.

The 1977 dispute was resolved by the adoption of a nationally agreed pay formula: that complex formula, based on the upper quarter of the average manual worker's pay, was agreed fully by the employers and union negotiators. It had the tacit support of the Government of the day, and has remained in place ever since. It has cross-party support in fire authorities up and down the country; indeed, the Home Office working party report produced in 1990 and signed by Earl Ferrers went further by explicitly recognising that the fire service and the public had been well served by the formula.

Since 1977, the pay year has run from November to November, following shortly after the annual publication of the Government's new earnings survey. For each of the past 15 years, the annual pay round has been settled amicably and speedily by application of the formula. I understand that industrial relations involving pay in this vital public service have remained second to none. Surely the Minister agrees that the morale of members of a service that is called routinely to deal with life-threatening situations is of paramount and obvious importance.

Last year, the formula resulted in a pay rise of about 4·9 per cent., which is readily comparable to the increases paid to other sectors. In fact, that comparability is built into the formula. I hope the Minister will accept that, because the formula is—by definition—time-lagged by a year, any pay freeze imposed by the Government will affect firefighters' pay twice over. Should the pay freeze be lifted next year

[Ms Kate Hoey]

and the formula reintroduced, firefighters will still receive a rise of only 1·5 per cent. or less, as it will be based on current public sector pay round settlements.

Where a comparable worker may have received, say, a 5 per cent. rise last year, 1·5 per cent. this year and—who knows?—3·5 per cent. next year, a firefighter will have received approximately 4·9 per cent. last year, 1·5 per cent. this year and 1·5 per cent. again next year. With the reimposition of the lagged formula, they will therefore be hit twice. Cannot the Minister accept that the easy and fair way out is simply to leave the pay formula in place and therefore let firefighters make their contribution to the Government's pay squeeze next year rather than this year?

I shall not trouble to ask the Minister whether the Government plan to impose a pay freeze next year, as we have not yet managed to get a straight answer from his Cabinet colleagues, but perhaps I should try to seek an unguarded response from him as by the time the debate is over his new boss may feel differently about pay freezes than his present boss, who will be responsible for them. I hope that, if the new Chancellor has learnt anything from his responsibility as Home Secretary, it will be the dedicated and valuable work of firefighters.

Are the Government seriously prepared to jeopardise the smooth running of this emergency service just to force down an independently worked out pay settlement from an expected level of between 2·5 and 3 per cent.? All this is being done merely so that the Government can impose their collective muscle on workers a year earlier than would otherwise happen automatically.

I shall not allow the Minister off the hook lightly with a bland assurance that it is not for the Government to intervene in the independent pay negotiations between employer and employee. The Minister seeks to give a straight answer to a straight question, and I hope that he will continue that habit this afternoon.

We all know perfectly well that the imposition of a 1·5 per cent. limit to the pay element of the standard spending assessment completely ties the hands of employers. A refusal fully to fund the independent pay formula rise in the SSA is effectively an edict from the Home Office that the formula must be abandoned.

That attack on the pay formula has already damaged morale. The damage must be placed in the context of the increasing demands that are being placed each year on an already overstretched service. Calls rose by 64 per cent. in the 1980s, but staffing rose by only 2·5 per cent. Without digressing too far, I say only that, for whatever reason and doubtless against the advice of fire inspectors, the House is a firefighters' nightmare. As a royal palace, and so exempt from health and safety regulations, it is a terrible accident waiting to happen.

Up and down the country, fire stations are being closed for reasons more to do with making cuts than with efficiently continuing the service assessed as being needed. In places, minimum standards of fire cover are arguably no longer being maintained. For example, the 890-bed Norwich hospital, formerly served at first call by three fire engines and a high-rise ladder, now looks set to be downgraded to be covered by only one fire engine.

I understand that the Public Accounts Committee found our record for fire deaths per head of population to be the worst of any of our partner countries in the European Community. That appalling slip in such a critical league table is evidence that Britain has lost its place as a world leader in fire service cover, not because of a lack of commitment, courage or innovation by firefighters and fire authorities, but simply because of a lack of cash.

I invite the Minister to tell me what progress has been made since I last raised certain issues in late 1991. I have given the Minister prior notice of my questions and I hope that he will be able to respond. First, what progress does he envisage making towards the adoption of the urban C risk category, tailored to the specific needs of a modern inner city? Secondly, will he make the welcome announcement of an exemption from the SSA of the increased revenue spending required by unavoidable pension liabilities? That would recognise the fact that the services provided in, for example, London may otherwise be cut by £2 million in real terms to cope with the 6 per cent. rise in pension costs for former officers.

Thirdly, when will the Government get around to amending the Fire Services Act 1947, which restricts the fire service's duties to firefighting? We all accept that firefighters have so many other essential calls on their time, as I outlined earlier. At this point, I pay tribute to the firefighters in Northern Ireland, especially in light of the recent terrible bombings in Belfast, Portadown and Magherafelt. Anyone who saw the firefighters being interviewed would also want to pay tribute to their dedication in dealing with the many difficulties they face. They often work in the areas in which they live and have to deal with incidents which greatly affect their part of the community.

I also applaud the region's Fire Brigades Union, which is able to bring together people from both sides of the community to fight the terrible atrocities. I of course pay tribute to firefighters in the rest of the United Kingdom, especially in view of the recent increase in terrorism. I hope that the Minister will join me in paying that tribute to them, not only for their commitment to saving property and life and for their dedication, but for the respect that they have accorded to the pay formula.

In 1991, the service received more than 1 million calls. The incidents involved the loss of 861 lives, including those of two firefighters. Insurance costs for the damage involved exceeded £1 billion. Over and above the individual misery, it is estimated that the cash cost of treating a child with severe burns can be more than £200,000. Does not the Minister realise that the contrived savings which the Government are trying to make cost more in cash and human suffering than we should be prepared to pay? Our firefighters deserve more. They have the full support of the people of this country, but they need the full support of the Government.

12.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): With the leave of the House, I shall speak again. As the House may be aware, I spoke earlier and shall be seeking leave to speak yet again before the day is over.

I thank the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Ms Hoey) for her opening remarks. I must also point out that it is not for me to speculate on any rumours that may be flying around the Westminster and Whitehall grapevine about changes

in ministerial responsibility, but before the day is through we shall no doubt learn whether her assessment of the situation is correct.

I shall try to address some of the points that the hon. Lady raised, but it gives me considerable pleasure to be able to respond to a debate on a subject which the hon. Lady has addressed before, and I know that she takes considerable interest in the work of the fire service. Hon. Members will know that the fire service is not a subject on which I normally address the House, but it is well respected in the community.

A few weeks ago, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary addressed a meeting of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association and made some remarks about the fire service. It was a private meeting and his speech was not widely reported, but it would not be inappropriate to repeat to the House what he said on that occasion. He said:

"It goes without saying that the Government, like the general public, has a high regard for what the fire service does and the professionalism and bravery which we associate almost as a matter of course with the men and women in it: in particular when they undertake fire fighting duties or expose themselves to danger in other kinds of emergency. They, and you, do a good job of which we can feel justifiably proud.".

I should like to take this opportunity to endorse the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend and the praise offered by the hon. Lady. I should like to add my endorsement to what she said about the fire fighting services in Northern Ireland.

The fire service also has a good productivity record, as the Fire Brigades Union has not been slow to point out. In the period between 1980 and 1991, the number of fire calls attended by the fire service increased by 23 per cent., the number of false alarms to which the fire service has to respond increased by 109 per cent. and the number of special service calls, which include road accidents and a whole range of other non-fire situations, as the hon. Lady suggested, increased by no less than 128 per cent. All that was achieved with an increase of only 2·5 per cent. in the numbers of personnel. It is a powerful and eloquent statement of the achievements in productivity.

There are, of course, reasons why the fire service has been able to achieve those apparent increases in productivity. The primary reason is that the disposition of fire service resources throughout the country is determined according to nationally recommended standards of fire cover which are determined by the risk presented by each part of the country. In other words, the same number of fire appliances may be needed in an area where there are two calls or 10 calls a day, but even if that is so, the work load on the firefighters has obviously increased during the period; we acknowledge that.

The fire service is local authority service financed by central and local government, and, like other public services, it cannot be immune from change or from the need to ensure that it delivers its services in a most efficient and cost-effective way. My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear on several occasions that he does not intend to recommend that standards of fire cover should be reduced, but that does not exempt the fire service from the need to examine itself and to consider, like all public services, whether the service which it delivers is being delivered in the most cost-effective manner and to the greatest benefit of the community at large.

HM inspectors of fire service who advise the Secretary of State on matters of efficiency of the fire service are very conscious when they inspect brigades of the need to ensure that brigades are delivering their services efficiently and economically.

There are a number of current issues of concern to members of the fire service which I should like to mention in responding to the hon. Lady. She mentioned pay and pensions, and I shall respond to both those subjects, but there are other issues too, and it would be helpful to touch on one or two of them to make sure that the Government have absolutely no hidden agenda for the fire service.

One example is the effect of the current review on the organisation of local government in England and Wales on the fire service. There are fears that the reorganisation of local government areas will lead to wholesale reorganisation of the fire service in England and Wales.

My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that he does not consider that the current review of local government is a suitable vehicle for any general reorganisation of the fire service in England, and he has made it clear to the Local Government Commission that he does not expect local government reorganisation to lead to any fragmentation of the fire service.

If some of the existing counties are broken up, it may be necessary to resort to combination schemes to maintain the size of existing fire brigades, and there may be one or two cases in which some further reorganisation is necessary because of significant changes in the structure of local government in particular areas. But apart from that, we see no good case for reviewing the organisation of the fire service in England until the process of local government reorganisation is complete and the building blocks of the new local authority structure are clear. The position in Wales is slightly different, but I do not think that it would be helpful for me to reiterate the arguments set out in the White Paper on Welsh local government reorganisation, with which I know that the House will be familiar.

I know that the level of finance available for the fire service is a matter of concern to chief officers and to elected members of the fire authorities both in the metropolitan areas and in the counties. But public expenditure is under pressure, and the fire service cannot expect to be exempted from that pressure. We know that, in some county areas, expenditure on the fire service has in some places exceeded the fire service element of the standard spending assessment. However, I think that we can say that there were fairly realistic settlements in 1991-92 and 1992-93, which helped to narrow the gap.

In the current financial year, fire authorities have been provided with an overall increase of 3·1 per cent. over last year, a reflection of what can be afforded by central Government, and an amount in line with the increase in the support for local authority expenditure generally. There are pressures on the financing of the fire service, but they are no greater than those being experienced by other local or central government services.

The hon. Lady raised the subject of fire service pay. Hon. Members will know that the Government have decided that there should be a limit on public sector pay in the current pay round and that pay rises for those working in central and local government—and indeed for hon. Members—should be contained within a maximum of 1·5 per cent. We have told all public sector employers that we expect them to have regard to that maximum in reaching

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

any settlements in the current pay round, and funding for all services, including the fire service, has been determined on that basis for the current financial year.

For the past 15 years, fire service pay has been determined according to a formula contained in an agreement between the firefighters and their employers, which links the pay of a qualified firefighter with five years' service to that of the upper quartile of manual workers' earnings.

The Fire Brigades Union has asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to give an assurance that its pay agreement will be honoured. I can only repeat to the House what my right hon. and learned Friend said to the union when its representatives came to see him on 17 March. If the Government's pay policy is to be applied fairly, there can be no case for making an exception for firefighters, any more than for police officers, doctors, nurses, or any other category of personnel.

Ms Hoey: The Minister says that everyone should be treated fairly, but does he not agree that, in a sense, the members of the Fire Brigades Union would not be being treated fairly, because they would suffer doubly? If we return to the national agreement next year—presumably the Government would like that to happen—again, firefighters will not be in the same position as everyone else.

Mr. Wardle: As the hon. Lady said, that is because of the timing of the pay round. I shall deal with timing in a moment.

It is not the Home Secretary who determines fire service pay: the pay agreement is a matter between the firefighters and their employers. As the hon. Lady said, the next fire service pay settlement will be in November. The employers have wisely said that it is too early at this stage to say whether the firefighters' pay formula will produce a figure higher or lower than 1·5 per cent. in the current pay round. The House would not expect me to speculate on what may not be the effect of applying the pay formula in 1994.

The Government have said that the objective of the 1·5 per cent. limit on public sector pay will be defeated if there is a series of catching-up settlements next year. How that will impact on the fire service in 1994 or, indeed, on any other public service can at this stage be no more than a matter for speculation. The hon. Lady talked about straight speaking. I shall not enter into such speculation.

For the fire service to be considering industrial action now on the application of its pay formula in 1994 is both premature and irresponsible. It is quite unrealistic to expect local authority employers to commit themselves to pay levels in 1994 when no decisions have been taken on the level of public sector funding for any central or local government services for the next financial year.

In my view, the union is asking for an impossible commitment from fire authority employers. It is plainly stirring up its members, for what must be political motives, to convince them that they are being singled out, unfairly treated or compared unfairly with other public sector employees. That simply is not the case.

I hope that the union does not resort to industrial action, of which there has been some talk. Firefighters are well paid. It is quite right that they should be well paid for the job that they do. I hope that their sense of responsibility will remain with them if they are asked to consider industrial action at some point in the coming months.

The hon. Lady mentioned fire service pensions. There is increasing pressure on the fire authorities caused by fire service pension liabilities. The fire service pension scheme, for which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is responsible, is not ungenerous, because it recognises, as if should, that the physical demands of firefighting will not permit firefighters to serve as long as is the case in some other professions, and that there are risks of injury or even death for which the scheme must provide. The firefighters' pension scheme is very similar to the pensions scheme for the police and the problems associated with the increasing pressures on the scheme are very similar.

We have no immediate plans to examine or to revise the firefighters' pension scheme. The scheme for the police will undoubtedly have been looked at in the course of the current review of police responsibilities and rewards which is being carried out by Sir Patrick Sheehy. The Sheehy inquiry is not looking at fire service pensions, but we shall need to look at any recommendations that Sheehy makes on police pensions if it appears that those recommendations, if accepted, could also be relevant to the fire service. At this stage, it would be wrong to speculate on whether there will be any such recommendations, what they will be and whether they will be relevant to the fire service scheme. We shall have to wait and see.

The hon. Lady mentioned special services, and also asked whether the Fire Services Act 1947 might be amended so that fire authorities have a duty to respond to special service calls. At present, they may at their discretion respond to such calls and they may charge the recipient for doing so, but they have no duty to respond to calls other than fire calls. We have no proposals to change the statutory basis on which special services are provided.

The hon. Lady also referred to the urban C risk category and to a new definition for that. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has put to the Home Office proposals for the division of the existing C fire risk category into urban C and rural C, with enhanced initial responses in terms of weight and speed of attack. The proposals arise from concern about loss of life and injuries in property fires in areas of C risk, taken together with the fact that the national fire cover standards recommend an initial attendance of only one appliance at fires in areas of C risk.

We have, of course, given careful consideration to the proposal, and we have looked at both the incidence of injuries and fatalities in fires in areas of C risk and the actual practices of fire brigades in responding to fires in those areas. The association's proposal would entail substantial additional resources for the fire services in England and Wales. Fire cover standards were reviewed in 1985 by the joint committee on standards of fire cover, and we have no proposals to conduct any further review.

I know that the Fire Brigades Union has also attempted to link the issue of pay with closure or downgrading of fire stations. Let me make it absolutely clear that a fire authority wishing to close or downgrade a fire station must seek the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend. It is his practice to grant approval only when he is satisfied that national fire cover standards will be maintained. The national standards were agreed in the Central Fire

Brigades Advisory Council, on which fire authorities and fire service employees are represented. However tight the pressures this year, all authorities in England and Wales have been able to set budgets that allow them to comply with the national standards.

I have been able to speak on only some aspects of the fire service in this debate, but I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising the subject. We regard the fire service highly, and we wish to see it maintained as an effective and professional organisation.

Immigration Services (Prestwick Airport)

1 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Thank you for allowing me to raise this subject today, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am pleased to say that much has happened since I first sought to initiate the debate. There has been a considerable amount of contact between immigration department officials, senior officials and the management at Prestwick airport and that has been paralleled by my discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister. I thank my hon. Friend for agreeing to reply to the debate. Having listened to his comments in a previous debate, I congratulate him both on his productivity and on his efficiency: I understand that this is the third debate to which he has replied today.

I should also like to thank my hon. Friend at this early stage for his recognition of the serious implications of the incident at Prestwick last week—a recognition of the importance of commitments made and which, it has to be said, failed at the first time of asking.

The incident to which I refer occurred last Thursday, 20 May. An aircraft carrying 180 passengers—customers—from the United States was diverted to Prestwick airport. It was two hours before immigration officials dealt with the first passenger. It took immigration officials one and a half hours to get from Glasgow to Prestwick whereas others who were advised of the diversion arrived in just over 40 minutes. Clearly, something was seriously wrong.

A doctor who had crossed the Atlantic for a 9 o'clock meeting in Glasgow was clearing immigration at Prestwick at that time—despite special arrangements made some time before, which failed to be recognised by staff in the Glasgow immigration office. The whole thing was a shambles. Those visitors to Scotland were not only inconvenienced but disillusioned. Business men were delayed and all concerned regarded the incident as a bad advertisement.

To understand the incident, we must review the history of Prestwick airport. Before March 1990, Prestwick had gateway status: it was the gateway to Scotland from across the Atlantic, and from the United States and Canada in particular. At that time, there was a monopoly, albeit a monopoly that was in the ownership of the British Airports Authority, which also held monopolies over other central belt airports—at Glasgow and Edinburgh. Before March 1990 there was considerable passenger throughput at Prestwick and a full customs and immigration service was in operation.

On 6 March 1990, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Parkinson, who visited my constituency last week and was warmly welcomed, announced the inevitable: an end to Prestwick's gateway status following a court judgment in a case brought by Air 2000 in May 1989. The then Secretary of State suggested that that action was taken because competition must be allowed to flourish. I approved of that. But that competitiveness has depended to a degree on Government services and on Government regulations to which I shall refer later.

At the time of that announcement, the then Transport Secretary said that Prestwick had to be allowed to compete fairly. As I have said, the BAA already owned Glasgow and Edinburgh airports. Inevitably with common ownership, there had to be rationalisation. Prestwick did lose out in the short term with respect to passenger transport as expected. It lost out with regard to

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

transatlantic scheduled flights and charters. I believe that that might well be only in the short term and I believe that the charter operators realise that.

To be fair, the BAA recognised the freight potential of Prestwick, but it did not maximise the opportunities. I am pleased to say that the circumstances changed again in April 1992 when Prestwick international airport, under the ownership of PIK Holdings Ltd., took over. That company was a combination of individuals involved in local and international business and local authority and enterprise company activities.

Since then, that company has enthusiastically and determinedly taken steps to boost freight business in particular and to make inroads into passenger transport. In the latter case, there has been some success with services established to Jersey and to Viga in the former USSR. There are only glimmers of prospects for the future.

The good news is that the airport is in profit, although it has been stunted given the excellent facilities that currently exist. Those facilities are enhanced by unusually good weather conditions. Prestwick is always open when other nearby airports are closed. For whatever reason, fog does not settle over Prestwick airport and that is a very important consideration. It gives Prestwick a major status as a diversion airport. That means that the airport must man all its services to cope at short notice with diversions.

On Thursday 20 May, PIK certainly coped admirably, but with one exception. As I said earlier, it took one hour and 30 minutes for immigration personnel to get on site at Prestwick. In February of this year, the full-time presence of immigration services at Prestwick was withdrawn. In February and March, I received assurances from my hon. Friend the Minister and from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that all would be well when diversions occurred and that immigration services would be on site within the hour.

The following points were pledged. First, that scheduled and charter flights would be covered. I have no complaints about that particular aspect. Secondly, that business and general air traffic passengers could be dealt with by remote. To date, I cannot complain about that.

However, we then come to diversion flights which, I was assured, would receive top priority treatment with immigration officers on site within the hour; an early morning call by an immigration officer on a daily basis to confirm that there were no diversions liable at the transatlantic peak arrival period of 7 am; and that a remote information transfer system, dependent on electronic mail and fax facilities, would ensure specific passenger needs would be met as they arose.

On 20 May every category failed the test. On learning of that early in the morning of 21 May, I contacted the Home Office and I pay tribute to the Home Office civil servant who responded most positively. On Monday and Tuesday, I had meetings with my hon. Friend the Minister. At the same time in Prestwick, senior officials met the airport management. I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Minister for his extremely positive interest and response. A mutually satisfactory agreement has been reached. While it perhaps falls short of a full day time immigration service 365 days per year—which would be ideal but not sound in economic terms—it is not justified, given current passenger usage.

We have reached agreement on the methods by which the needs of the airport can be met to cover diversions. It will ensure a daily presence at the critical times and that is most important. It goes further in an innovative and imaginative way with regard to the use of personnel from Customs and Excise for clearing general traffic at the airport. That says a lot for the co-operation between Government Departments and the flexibility and attitudes of staff at Prestwick for whom I have the highest regard.

While eagerly awaiting my hon. Friend the Minister's comments on these issues, I take this opportunity to seek his much-appreciated support and assistance. In that regard, I refer to freight use at Prestwick airport. In Scotland, the key industry is the electronics industry. Major companies from across the international scene participate in the silica glen, as it is known. IBM, Digital, Compaq, Motorola and Prestwick Circuits are just a few. They have a key requirement for international trade. They must get components in quickly and on schedule and get added-value products out. That means jobs in Scotland and a boost to Scotland's economy and—as part of the Union—the United Kingdom economy. It is not simply value for the companies but provides such services for the nation.

Prestwick has the opportunity to play a vital role in the European Community and beyond. Currently, we lose opportunities because of restrictive rules set by the United Kingdom Government. I am aware that major international electronic companies scratch their heads when they realise that freight liners flying into Prestwick can deliver components but cannot pick up products to distribute elsewhere, even though it is on the aircraft's run. There is something wrong with that. Of course, I am referring to the issue of fifth freedom rights.

I would be obliged if my hon. Friend will pass on my comments to our mutually right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and suggest that he have a chat with the United States Transport Secretary, Frederico Fena, about a true open-skies policy in the United Kingdom, the United States and beyond. Such a policy should be imposed on Prestwick for advantage in the longer term. If the United Kingdom and the United States take that step, other nations will follow. That would be of great advantage to the United Kingdom manufacturers, United Kingdom airlines and, most importantly, Prestwick airport.

If my hon. Friend passes on those thoughts, he will be a true friend of Prestwick. He has certainly advanced the interests of Prestwick in the past few days. Recently, Prestwick has been boosted by the Government's actions and, to some degree, local authority actions. There have been moves to upgrade access to Prestwick with regard to the A77 and M8 links and the M77 projections for the future. Moves are being made which could well result in a rail halt at Prestwick and trunk road status for the A70, improving access to Prestwick still further.

There is an innovative idea to provide combined air and rail tickets for those who use Prestwick airport. I understand that the idea is unique in the world. We do not want Government regulation which stops such good ideas being used to Prestwick's advantage. I remind my hon. Friend again that fifth freedom rights and an end to current restrictions would certainly give Prestwick and the United Kingdom trade a great boost.

The message that I hope to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister is a clear statement which all airlines can sign

on to that Prestwick is open for business—quality business—and that there will be no future delays as a result of Government agency problems. Sadly, when I leave the Chamber today I will fly back to Glasgow. I shall be happy to return to Scotland, but I look forward to the day when I can fly from London to Prestwick airport. I look forward to my hon. Friend's words.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Wardle): With the leave of the House, I shall speak for the third time in today's debates. I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend on raising this important subject today. I thank him for his strong and articulate advocacy of the interests of Prestwick airport and his general constituency interests. In the past year or so he has represented his constituency interests on several occasions in the most powerful and constructive fashion.

I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about the immigration service and officials in the Home Department. I accept entirely his constructive criticism of the event which he outlined, which I shall deal with in a moment. Before I do so, I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will have noted carefully what my hon. Friend has had to say.

It may be helpful if I first explain the background to the decision to withdraw the permanent immigration service presence from Prestwick airport and provide immigration control coverage for that airport from Glasgow airport instead. Over the years, in particular since Glasgow airport was opened to transatlantic flights, there has been a decline in the volume of traffic at Prestwick.

As my hon. Friend reminded me, the management of Prestwick airport has many plans to increase the traffic at Prestwick, but in recent years the volume has declined. For example, in 1988 more than 162,000 passengers arrived at Prestwick. Last year that number was just fewer than 10,000, of which more than 7,000 were European Community nationals. For some time, the only traffic has been business or military, apart from the occasional diversion of scheduled flights from other airports, which my hon. Friend described. Hardly any of the passengers on those flights need extensive examination under the terms of the Immigration Act 1988.

The immigration service had run down staff levels at Prestwick over a period, but the point was reached at which the three immigration officers and one chief immigration officer who remained were spending little time on passenger work. The immigration service has a duty to provide its customers with an efficient service, but also a responsibility, of which I am mindful, to employ its resources in the most efficient manner.

The levels of passenger traffic simply did not justify the retention of a permanent immigration presence at Prestwick, at least for the time being. PIK's traffic forecasts did not point to any significant increase in the immediate future. The immigration service could not justify the retention of four staff to deal with what amounted to one arriving and two embarking on commercial services a week.

The decision was therefore taken earlier this year, as my hon. Friend reminded the House, to transfer the four officers to the immigration office at Glasgow airport, which carries out a greater volume and range of immigration work, and provide immigration coverage for Prestwick from that office. As my hon. Friend is aware, that decision does not affect Prestwick's status as a designated airport under the Immigration Act 1971. That status means that the immigration service is bound to provide coverage and it has assured PIK that regular services will be covered. I should mention that Prestwick is not the only designated port of entry in this country where the immigration service does not maintain a permanent presence. Southampton, Liverpool and Teesside airports are all designated ports at which immigration cover is provided from neighbouring offices. It depends on the regular volume of traffic.

Mr. Gallie: I accept what my hon. Friend says, but none of those airports has the diversionary role of Prestwick.

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend has anticipated precisely where I have reached in my speech.

I am aware of Prestwick's role as a diversionary airport. The majority of diversionary traffic which it receives is from Glasgow. Last year only six flights were diverted to Prestwick from either Heathrow or Gatwick. Prestwick was not previously staffed on a 24-hour basis and many diversions arrive out of hours. It is, of course, difficult to cater for infrequent and unpredictable occurrences. Not all diversions require the physical attendance of an immigration officer, but when required, the immigration service promises that an officer or officers will be sent as quickly as possible.

On the morning of 20 May the immigration service at Glasgow was first notified by PIK of the possible diversion of two wide-bodied aircraft from Glasgow at one minute past 7 in the morning. At quarter past 7, it received confirmation that flight NW34 from Boston would divert to Prestwick. Two immigration officers were immediately despatched by road to Prestwick.

The shortest distance between Glasgow and Prestwick is about 35 road miles, which normally takes, with reasonable driving conditions, about an hour. The officers expected poor traffic conditions and fog on the usual route, with which my hon. Friend will be familiar, and accordingly decided that, on balance, they would be quicker and safer to take the longer coastal route. Unfortunately, that assessment proved to be wrong and their journey was hampered by heavy local traffic. They did not arrive at Prestwick until shortly before 9 o'clock when they immediately began clearance of the flight's passengers. Clearance was completed by 9.30 am.

I understand that, initially, the passengers were kept on board the aircraft awaiting the arrival of the immigration officers. The Northwest Airlines station manager has confirmed that he boarded the aircraft as soon as it came on stand at Prestwick and announced to the passengers that he intended to keep them on board. He took that initial decision because he still had to assess whether to disembark at Prestwick or part refuel and continue to Glasgow. He also wished to confirm the immigration position. At no point did the immigration service suggest that the passengers should be held on board the aircraft.

At 8.40 am an officer from PIK telephoned to complain that the immigration officers had not yet arrived. He asked if he was expected to continue holding the passengers on board the aircraft. He was advised that there was no need for this and that the passengers could disembark, provided that they were kept airside until seen by an immigration

[Mr. Wardle]

officer. That practice has been followed on previous occasions, when passengers were able to wait in comfort in a transit lounge, until the immigration service was ready to act.

I regret that the passengers on NW34 were delayed longer than would normally be expected in the circumstances. The immigration service is reviewing its procedures for responding to diversions in future. The Glasgow office car is to be fitted with a radio link. Meanwhile, an instruction has been issued to all staff travelling to Prestwick to take a mobile telephone. Officers have also been instructed to report immediately any delay. Communications will, therefore, improve.

The immigration service has always made it clear that it cannot guarantee immediate attendance at Prestwick for diverting flights without at least some advance notice, but the improvements should ensure that the system is better managed and reduce the scope for error. I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern, however, that the level of immigration coverage at Prestwick should not be detrimental to the airport's development.

I am pleased to say that there have been some useful discussions this week between the immigration service and senior representatives of PIK which should ensure prompt coverage of diverted flights arriving in the early morning, the usual time of arrival for flights diverted from the trans-Atlantic routes, and generally improved communications, with the aim of securing a reasonable level of service with a reasonable level of resources. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to accept this explanation and apology for what happened.

This is a good opportunity to make some more general remarks about the immigration service. It is an encouraging sign of economic recovery that the number of passengers arriving at our ports and airports has increased substantially in the past year. I am now taking a countrywide view in which I know that my hon.Friend will be interested. That must be good news for Prestwick airport and for all other airports and seaports as well as the airlines and ferry companies which operate the services.

The growth is significant. Just over 54 million passengers arrived in the United Kingdom last year compared with some 46 million in 1991, an increase of about 16 per cent. Heathrow remains by far the busiest international airport in the world and Gatwick is the third largest. The position of the United Kingdom as a destination for travellers, a base for overseas business men and a hub for airline transfer traffic to destinations all over the world is of great economic importance and a matter in which we should take real pride.

The debate reminds us that it is not only London and the south-east that are welcoming overseas visitors. Airports in other parts of the United Kingdom are expanding and adapting to provide more and better services. Scotland has seen substantial growth in traffic, Birmingham opened a second terminal a couple of years ago and Manchester opened a splendid second terminal in only March this year which I look forward to visiting shortly. We all wish such enterprises well. They provide jobs, status and prosperity to the local area and bring in much needed overseas business.

It is particularly encouraging to note that the number of foreign visitors to the United Kingdom is increasing rapidly. There were some 6·5 million foreign visitors to Britain last year compared with 5·7 million in 1991. That figure does not include EC nationals who are not counted by category but who might well double the figure of 6·5 million. Tourism and leisure is Britain's largest industry, employing 10 per cent. of our entire work force. How important it is then that all concerned should make every effort to attract visitors here.

At a time when we are facing increasing competition in tourism from many other countries it is essential that the immigration service can respond to the upturn in passenger numbers. The travelling public must be given a high quality of service but, at the same time, we must ensure that nothing is done to diminish the effectiveness of our controls against illegal immigration.

I also hope that hon. Members who have taken their cars to the continent, returning through Dover's eastern docks, will be aware that the world's busiest international ferry terminal shows a marked improvement in the time taken for people to pass through immigration control. The introduction of car channelling at Dover's eastern docks last year, based on EC and non-EC passport lanes, resulted in only 2 per cent. of all arriving cars waiting more than six minutes, whereas during the same summer peak period in the previous year 10 per cent. of all cars were waiting for more than 18 minutes. That is a considerable achievement on which I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate the local immigration staff and managers.

The processing rate at Dover can now reach 1,000 cars an hour. It is all the more creditable that immigration officers managed at the same time to detect more forged documents in all that traffic and in the first quarter of 1993, in the south-east district, they detected 215 forged documents which were presented at immigration control. That is an increase of 25 per cent. over the same period last year. It is essential to preserve the effectiveness of our immigration controls, whether at sea ports or at airports, at the same time as improving their efficiency.

Improvements in the quality of service offered by the immigration service are not confined to reducing delays at airports and ports. I am pleased to be able to report that the public inquiry office in Glasgow, which deals with applications for extension of stay, was reopened last month. That is another subject on which my hon. Friend has made representations to me in the House.

The office was closed for some time, but improvements were made to the premises and it is open again—providing an improved service to customers, with staff specially recruited for the work. I hope that that development will be welcomed by people in Scotland, and I look forward to seeing that facility myself fairly soon.

Public Transport (London)

1.29 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful for this opportunity to initiate a short but important debate on public transport in London. I understand that not many yards from here, a Whitehall shuffle is going on. Ministers are going to Downing street with one job and coming out with another. This debate is about shuffling the people of London around, and I venture to suggest that the same principles apply in both cases.

It is no use shuffling people around if the policies are not right and unless everyone ends up going in the same direction, on the right track. I hope that today we shall touch base across the Floor of the House and identify the breadth and common nature of concern felt by those of us who represent not just London constituents but those who visit and work in London that we must get a grip on the way London's public transport is organised and run.

My first point is not a new song for me. We must end the uncertainty about the Jubilee line and at last get that line and its extension going ahead. Earlier today, I was briefly optimistic that an announcement might be made in the midst of all the other activity over the road. Yesterday, an unstarred question was tabled by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), asking the Prime Minister

"if he will make a further statement on the Government's commitment to making a contribution to the Jubilee line extension."

I telephoned the Department of Transport, but someone there said, "The reply will not come from us—that question is to be answered by the Prime Minister." For a moment, I thought that the Prime Minister would say, "Done—you've got it today." Sadly, that was not the case. The Prime Minister's reply, given just a matter of minutes ago, was:

"The Government, and I personally, remain committed to the Jubilee line extension as a major addition to the infrastructure of docklands and of London's transport. We have earmarked public funds for the line. As soon as negotiations with the companies involved in the financing of Canary Wharf have been concluded satisfactorily my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport"—

whoever he or she may be now—

"will authorise the start of construction and the first tranche of those funds will be made available. The line will then be built within an estimated 53 months."

I pause, because this last sentence is important:

"The draft funding agreement specifies that swingeing penalty payments will come into force if the line is not completed seven months after that."

We are very near, but not quite there—and it is about time that we were. I hope that the Minister can say how many centimetres from the line we are, and how we are to get from here to there without tripping again.

My second point is really a response to events since the last general election. I welcome the appointment of a Minister for Transport in London and that there is a Cabinet Committee for London. However, London does not have a co-ordinating forum in which to discuss transport issues. I will not argue today—because I know that I would not receive a response—for a regionally elected, democratic body, but that is what I want and it is something for which my party argues. The Government do not endorse that proposal. I argue instead for an alternative which I hope that the Government will find acceptable, and which I believe all right hon. and hon. Members will consider something better than we have now.

My suggestion picks up on a request made only this week by business leaders in the capital. I refer to the establishment by the Minister of a body that I shall call for the sake of today's debate the capital transport forum, which would meet regularly to bring together representatives of both Houses, local government, statutory undertakings, users and the business community.

I hope that we start to discuss the strategic development of the transport service, rather than relying on announcements about crossrail one week, about the Jubilee line the next week, about travelcard the week after that and about potential British Rail changes the following week. With the best will in the world, I do not believe that that is the way to run a system. The railways, the buses, the tubes, the river and the roads are all part of the whole, and should be seen as such.

I know that others want to speak about specific issues; let me make some general points. I believe that the future of London's transport has reached a crucial and critical point, and that there is a danger of a crisis of confidence in the system and its continuation, because of the projected reduction in capital from the public purse owing to public expenditure restraint. That, by definition, will inhibit investment. In 1991, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission stated that, if the capital was to have the decent, modern metro system that it needed, we should have to spend about £750 million a year. We are nowhere near that level of commitment.

I do not dissent dogmatically from the idea that it is possible to seek partnership funding for certain projects, but I do not believe that it is possible to plan on the basis of partnership funding that is not secure. We cannot announce project X, Y or Z as agreed, firm and secure when there is no guarantee that the money will be forthcoming. The Jubilee line was the best and, indeed, the first example of that—an example that has prompted the concern that some of us feel about private money coming into crossrail and other parts of British Rail. At present, there is no guarantee of funds.

I do not object to the range and number of initiatives that are currently in hand, but they do not add up to a coherent whole. Too many appear to be the result of dithering or muddle: certainly that is the impression gained by many Londoners, including constituents who have written to me on the subject. In the past year, I have received more letters from constituents about transport issues than I received in my previous nine years in the House.

The Government say that they intend to introduce legislation in the next Queen's Speech to deregulate buses in London. There are serious and justified doubts about the benefits of deregulation, based on evidence. I was present during Transport questions on Monday, when Ministers tried to rebut that suggestion; their arguments do not stand up. Since 1982, bus patronage outside London has declined by 25 per cent. in the metropolitan areas and by 18 per cent. in the shires. In London, it has increased by 10 per cent. During that period, bus deregulation applied in the areas outside London, but not in London. In 1991-92—the last full year for which figures are available—bus patronage in the country fell by a further 4·5 per cent., and it has fallen by 10 per cent. over the past two years. In London, it has fallen by only 2·5 per

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

cent. over the past year, and by 3·3 per cent. over the past two years. Again, deregulation has applied only outside London.

The Government will say that people are using public transport less, but that is generally true both inside and outside the capital. I believe that deregulation poses the risk of a substantial reduction in the number of people who travel on London's buses.

Interesting cost-analysis comparisons can be made between deregulation and the continuation of tendering. Let me stick my neck out: I accept that tendering has cut costs significantly. I believe that, to date, the figure is 15 per cent.; that has been confirmed by the Department of Transport, although I gather that, according to London Regional Transport, it may be nearer 30 per cent. Its prediction—it is important to separate the two—is that by 1998, without the distraction of deregulation but with 100 per cent. tendering, we could go from a £30 million deficit to a £10 million surplus. If it is possible to achieve that, we should seize the opportunity with both hands. Our bus network could break even without deregulation, and surely that should be our aim.

I beseech the Government to change course on deregulation now, and that is different from privatising and selling off bus companies in London. Serious concerns have been expressed about the continuation of loss-making services and overcrowding on profitable routes.

I agree with the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and other hon. Members that we need to upgrade our underground system, and some lines more than others. The Northern line from Barnet to Southwark is such an example. In its present state, people will not be encouraged to use the underground.

During the Easter recess, I went to speak to a conference in Mexico. I had never visited Latin America previously, but the underground system in Mexico City was a delight. It was clean, efficient, well lit and fast. We need such a system.

I want to allude to the controversy about concessionary fares and travelcards. There is a genuine and valid fear that the present concessionary fares schemes will not continue after deregulation or privatisation of British Rail because it is a matter for negotiation with London boroughs. At the very least, it will be extremely difficult because of the additional number of operators who will be part of the negotiating process. There is a severe risk, although it has not been alluded to as such, that we shall lose half fares for children, which form an important part of the system. Yes, it could be imposed on the boroughs, but unless we are clear that that principle is accepted by the Government we are at risk. In the week when the Government did a U-turn —or gave clarification, to be more generous to them— about the railcard, I hope that a similar guarantee will be given about the future of the travelcard. We must not have continued wranglings between British Rail, London Transport and the Government. We must have a guarantee that the travelcard and concessionary fares, including children's fares, will continue.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It is his debate, but it is on London's transport. I have a letter that was signed by the Minister only yesterday on the issue of travelcards. He says:

> "In the forthcoming legislation . . . all operators in London—rail and tube as well as bus—have the right to participate on fair terms in any multi-modal or multi-operator ticketing scheme."

That sounds okay, but it offers only the opportunity for many of the operators to participate and denies present owners the right to issue such a ticket, which may not exist in future. He goes on about stored value tickets, which are a different thing and would be a step backwards.

Mr. Hughes: I hope that the Minister will deal with the hon. Gentleman's valid point. There is no doubt that concern is being expressed across London. For example, I was with pensioner groups yesterday and I know that it is not a party or borough-based matter. It is a London-wide matter.

I wish quickly to talk about rail and tube and the two projects that have hit the headlines. I have made the point about the need for the Jubilee line extension to go ahead. We have been plagued by uncertainty and businesses are going under because of the blight of not knowing whether the extension will go ahead. Having got so far, however, it would be madness not to ensure that all the people concerned deliver the goods so that we can get on with it. Not only is it holding up interests such as development of the parliamentary buildings but it is affecting the link between Waterloo and London Bridge, the link to docklands, the east Thames strategic plan and the link to Stratford. Many strategic objectives will be attained, and if docklands is not to be the white elephant that it could still be, the sooner the Jubilee line extension is announced the better. We must be at a minute to midnight, but we must get over the line. I sincerely hope that we will not back off that.

In declaring their support for crossrail, the Government have not thought through the way in which it links with the channel tunel rail link. It affects east London and is a good example of how the strategic view of the Paddington-Heathrow line, crossrail and the channel tunnel rail link need to be co-ordinated, otherwise we risk finding a simplistic or wrong solution even if we pay a great deal for it.

I shall conclude because I wish to leave the Minister plenty of time to respond positively. I hope that we shall receive reaffirmation of the Government's support for a riverbus, eventually—as I have heard the Minister say in private—as an integrated part of London's transport system. At the moment, the scheme is guaranteed only until the end of the year, and then only because of the private sector. We need to move quickly to decongest our roads through the schemes that the Government have now accepted, such as road pricing and other systems being piloted in the boroughs.

We need a fair decision on taxis and minicabs. The issue, which I know presents some difficulty, has been sitting on the Minister's desk for months. I hope that we can reconcile the different interests for the benefit of the passengers.

Lastly, we need a cordon sanitaire—a phrase used in a letter to me—around London to protect the centre from helicopter flights other than for the emergency services. That is preferable to having each application dealt with separately and then knocked on the head. It cannot be good for the quality of life in the capital to have helicopters flying in and out and overhead.

Transport could be the issue which determines what happens in next year's local elections in London. If the

Government score own goals, they will be in worse trouble because of their policies. I hope that the Minister's experience since the general election will mean, first, that he will keep his job when the reshuffle is sorted out later today, whoever his Secretary of State may be, and, secondly, that he will give all those who share his interest in getting it right the opportunity to sit around a table regularly to put their arguments, to win the case and make London a city in which we do not shuffle around but move *around* with a common objective—the prosperity of our city.

1.46 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Gentleman begins, may I ask whether he has received the assent of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermonsey (Mr. Hughes) and the Minister?

Mr. Marshall: Both have agreed that I may speak because both will hear words with which they can agree.

As a Member of Parliament representing a London constituency, I welcome the Government's commitment to the deregulation and privatisation of London's buses which, I believe, will lead to greater investment and innovation, both of which are needed in our capital city.

My main reason for speaking is that I represent Hendon and many of my constituents use the Northern line daily. The line is celebrating its centenary, but its passengers are not celebrating. The trains are frequently ancient, frequently graffiti-ridden and, all too often, they are less frequent than they should be. The stations are uninviting, security is inadequate and there is a clear need for massive investment if the line is to be adequate for the 21st century. I hope that the Minister for Transport in London will assure the House that the Government are strongly committed to modernising the Northern line and providing an adequate system for my constituents and the many others who travel on it.

1.48 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes)——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister will need the leave of the House.

Mr. Norris: Indeed, Madam Deputy Speaker, I had forgotten the pleasure of speaking earlier this morning. How remiss of me. It was indeed a pleasure although not under your Chairmanship—perhaps that is what caused my momentary lapse of memory. With the leave of the House, I shall speak again. I know that the packed House is keen to make progress but I hope that the hundreds of hon. Members here will allow me to say a few words.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey must be congratulated on securing the debate. He and I have had a number of discussions about transport in London. I recognise his genuine interest in the matter and, although we do not always agree, he sets out his arguments fairly. I am also pleased to acknowledge the interest of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is also an assiduous correspondent of mine on transport issues—and long may he continue to be so, provided that it is as a member of the Opposition while I am a Minister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) also intervened. Before addressing the points made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, let me say that my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South is immensely assiduous in pressing the case for early improvement of the Northern line, and he has every reason to do so. I should draw his and the House's attention to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the Underground, which specifically drew attention to the fact that, by management action, London Underground has been able substantially to improve the quality of service on the Northern line, which no longer deserves the tag of "the misery line" that it once had. That in no sense diminishes the importance of an eventual programme of improvement and refurbishment on the Northern line and I hope that, with London Transport, we can embark on that as soon as practicable.

My concern about the otherwise excellent speech of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was that he covered so much ground. He managed to cover a new forum for London, the Jubilee line, crossrail, bus deregulation, river bus money, taxis and helicopters. That is my list and it seemed about enough.

Mr. Spearing: What about travelcard?

Mr. Norris: I had travelcard under the context of bus deregulation. That is about enough to keep us going from now until about 10 o'clock this evening, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I know that you will allow me only another 10 minutes, so I will have to pick some large bones out of an extremely complex fish.

I believe that the hon. Gentleman needs and deserves some explanation, first on the Jubilee line. He quoted from the answer which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to a question literally a few minutes ago. There is no doubt, and that answer underlines it, of the Government's commitment to their contribution of what is essentially, and always has been, a joint venture. It is a developer contribution project in which the developer, originally Olympia and York, recognised that the extension of the Jubilee line linking Canary Wharf with somewhere that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food knows too well—the Ritz, Green park and all stations thereafter—would substantially enhance the value of that development, not just by a few millions, but by hundreds of millions of pounds.

It was not an act of charity but one of sensible and careful negotiation when Olympia and York agreed to make a substantial developer contribution, in addition to that of the taxpayer, to the creation of the new line, which has real benefit for the hon. Gentleman's constituency and for all areas of docklands through which the new extension will pass.

I find it immensely frustrating that we are not already digging that line. However, I do not believe that I am alone in that. It is equally frustrating not only for London Transport, but for the creditors of Olympia and York and for the many peope of docklands who would welcome the arrival of this valuable amenity. I can say to the hon. Gentleman only that our negotiations are continuing, and that my own view is that good faith is crucial in these matters. If one can actually see expressions of good faith on all sides—and I do—I very much hope that we shall be able to bring the negotiations to a speedy conclusion.

[Mr. Norris]

I sought a metaphor which was neither sexist nor sizeist, but I am driven none the less to the old phrase that the opera is not over until the fat lady sings. What I believe is meant by that aphorism is that one can never say that something is done until it is done. I am sorry that that is unsatisfactory and recognise that it echoes words I spoke to the hon. Gentleman in the Chamber some months ago. Suffice it to say that, with good will, progress is being made.

I would make one more point and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept it. There is, of course, another way. I do not believe that he is counselling it on me as it would be a variation from his original position, but there are those who counsel on me abandoning the idea of a private sector contribution and going ahead with the line. They must understand that that is suggesting that we let the taxpayer pay an extra half a billion pounds—I ought not to overstate the case; it is £400 million—because we are not prepared to pursue the developer contribution which is a reflection of the development gain from which that project will benefit. I believe that it is my job, and the job of Her Majesty's Government, always to protect the interests of the taxpayers—the interests of those who can ill afford to find the taxes that they are currently charged. I see no merit whatever in simply and easily passing that extra burden on to them.

Mr. Spearing *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I have only six minutes left.

The hon. Gentleman raised the subject of bus deregulation. I am sorry that he and I are likely to disagree in the months to come about its merits or otherwise, but we may as well get some things clear now. If we consider the different rates of decline in bus patronage inside and outside London—those figures go back to the second world war—we see that there has been a consistent decline, related more than anything else to the development of the private car, and to its increased ownership in the population and the ease with which it can be used by commuters to travel to work. The figures are interesting because they show a fairly steady decline outside London where, with some notable exceptions, there is still no great difficulty in parking fairly close to work. People come in from outlying rural areas and they can park in the centre of town.

If people have the choice, they generally use their own private cars, even if that is marginally more expensive, because of the convenience, the safety and the ability to control one's own travelling temperature, noise level, type of music, and so on.

Significantly, in London the rate of decline in bus patronage has been lower, for no better reason than the fact that in London what matters is not what one pays for one's car, or who is paying for the petrol, or even the city congestion charge; as every Member of the House, including yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, knows only too well, what really determines whether one uses a private car in central London is whether there is somewhere to park when one gets to the centre of London. Of course, in central London there is much less chance of that. It is no accident, therefore, that 86 per cent. of those who come into London to work every day do so by public transport.

When we consider what has happened under deregulation, let us first set entirely to one side the initial fares hike which resulted from a rapid reduction in subsidy by some local authorities faced with capping problems. That happened to coincide with deregulation. However, as the hon. Gentleman was kind enough to acknowledge, deregulation itself has produced a sharp reduction in operating costs and an increase in bus mileage. The effect on fares is arguable, because of the relationship between fares and local authority support, but it is interesting that over the past four years fares have gone up faster in London, where fares have been controlled by the state and by a nationalised industry, than outside London, where fare increases have been lower. That has been due in no small measure to competition in the marketplace, which has held fares down.

I have three minutes left in which to say some important things to the people of London, via the hon. Gentleman. I am sorry to have to say this, but if, for whatever reason, scare stories are put about, I must rebut them. First, we have committed ourselves to supporting unprofitable but socially desirable services, and that support is to be provided by the central bus authority, which is now sometimes referred to as the London bus executive. The body will subsidise those routes, as happens now with subsidy and support of unprofitable routes.

The concessionary fares arrangements will continue. Of course, there will be a new pattern for negotiation, but they will continue to be funded by the local authorities. As before, it will be for local authorities to determine what should be the rate and what should be the pattern, and who to include and who to exclude—children, elderly people, and so on.

The hon. Gentleman knows what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in relation to the travelcard during the passage of the Railways Bill about the franchising director's ability to direct appropriate franchisees to enter what would effectively be a travelcard scheme. I assure him that I am in no doubt whatever about the importance of travelcards in London. London is my city, as it is the hon. Gentleman's. I have used the travelcard for many years and I know that I shall continue to do so. I have no doubt that our arrangements will ensure that travelcards continue.

I am sorry not to have had the time to respond on other matters. On the point about a forum, we have a multiplicity of forums available to us. I hope that we shall not descend to the level of a talking shop. I shall consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Just for the record, expenditure in real terms was £249 million when the Government came into office. It was about £300 million in real terms in the last year of the Greater London council. This year, excluding the mega-projects, the figure is more than £500 million and that level of investment is continuing.

I am sorry not to have been able to answer more of the hon. Gentleman's questions. I shall, of course, write to him if he wants urgent answers. I look forward to more, inevitable debates on this important subject. I understand the importance of the issue.

Poultrymeat Industry

2 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for being present to debate what I consider to be an important subject, not only for my part of the world, but for the United Kingdom consumer and for the United Kingdom poultrymeat industry.

I have a constituency interest relating to a successful concern known as Sun Valley Poultry. It hides its light under a bushel, as it does not advertise on television in the same extrovert manner as other poultrymeat producers, but it is a success story. The poultrymeat industry as a whole is a success story. The figures show that in 1981 it accounted for 21·9 per cent. of total meat consumption; in 1991, 10 years later, it was 30·1 per cent. and the figure is still increasing. I admire Sun Valley for the way in which it has developed its business, and for the way in which it has survived and continued to perform steadily throughout the recession. It is a success story without doubt.

The national poultrymeat industry employs some 50,000 people and a further 150,000 people depend on it for their jobs. Almost as importantly from an agricultural point of view, when agriculture is under distinct stress, the industry is a massive consumer of feed wheat. Considering the amount of cereals grown in Herefordshire, my farmers are greatly indebted to Sun Valley and to the poultrymeat industry for enabling them to grow a crop for which there is a market. They are very effective, as is Sun Valley, and that success is reflected across the country.

Having shown that the industry is such a success story, one might ask why I should raise the subject at all. Normally, the purpose of Adjournment debates is for a grievance to be raised, not for a success to be praised. However, there are important reasons for raising the matter this afternoon. On the positive side, I am raising the matter because I want the industry to be able to build on its success. There are storm clouds around, to put it mildly. In 1988, only five years ago, imports of poultrymeat into this country comprised 7 per cent. of consumption. By 1991, imports had gone up to 18 per cent. By 1992, if one extrapolates beyond 15 September, we see a figure of 20 per cent. Even after the devaluation effects, we find that imports are sustaining a level of 18 per cent.

If we have a success story, we should be trying to create a climate in which the industry can deploy the results of that success. We should build up our exports and be positive in the Community, rather than being seen as an export opportunity by fellow members of the EC. It is right that we should ask why it is not happening in that way. Why are we sustaining an import level of 18 per cent. when, given how successful we are, we should really be a net exporter?

A straw in the wind—a straw in the storm, perhaps—was the decision by Cargill to locate its new plant just south of Orleans in France. As the House knows, Cargill is the owner of Sun Valley Poultry. It is very big internationally in the poultrymeat and cereals market. It is a multinational company and it knows its business. It has decided to put a plant down in France even though the expertise that led it to purchase Sun Valley Poultry in the first place lies here in the United Kingdom. Why?

The answer lies in a letter sent to me by one of my constituents, which I have passed to Ministers. Apparently, the vice-president of Cargill reflected to a study group of United Kingdom farmers visiting Minnesota that Cargill was a world trading organisation but that—and here is the crunch—

"nowhere in the world had Cargills encountered so much self-destructive bureaucratic red tape, which was rapidly strangling the United Kingdom poultry industry."

That is the view from outside and it has made capital investment move out of this country into another country. However good a European I may be, I feel that the home team is being deprived of an opportunity and that we ought to address ourselves to the reasons why.

Without doubt, the answer lies here in the United Kingdom. Nowhere in the Community is legislation as rigidly and nitpickingly interpreted as it is here. There is no reason why legislation should not be interpreted and followed, but, if it is not, once again, one must ask why. I know full well that my hon. Friend the Minister has been engaged in a consultation exercise with the poultrymeat industry with the objective of getting rid of unnecessary regulation wherever possible. The poultrymeat industry has responded with a long list of niggling points. I emphasise that I shall not go through them all today.

I want to make absolutely clear the commitment of the United Kingdom industry to quality. In his letter to me on 19 January, my hon. Friend the Minister referred to his reluctance and, indeed, determination not to compromise

"the high level of protection at present afforded to consumers of United Kingdom poultrymeat".

In that, my hon. Friend and the industry are on entirely the same wavelength. There is no way that the industry wishes to compromise its standards. In fact, it has been ahead of the legislation for 20 years. It has not waited for legislation but has got on with the job. The industry is also fully committed to the implementation of the Food Safety Act 1990. I make that clear because it is easy to misunderstand the poultrymeat industry.

Poultrymeat inspection has to be the first handicap that the industry faces. I congratulate Ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on having used the United Kingdom presidency of the Community last year to secure a new poultrymeat hygiene directive. In a letter on 23 March, I was told:

"We will be announcing in due course our plans for implementing this new Directive."

Having been told that the directive is being worked out and implemented, I am concerned to discover that it will not come into force this year or next year. In fact, it will not come into effect before 1995. That is an extraordinary length of time when we consider that we continually face the threat of imports. We should not doubt the fact that French producers look to the United Kingdom market whenever there is an opportunity.

If the poultrymeat industry is at least a generation ahead of the red meat industry, why must we wait for the red meat industry? As the mechanisms are already in place for the poultrymeat industry when they might not be for the red meat industry, why can we not establish the necessary arrangements to enable the poultrymeat industry to get on with the job, on an equal basis with its Community competitors, without having to wait until 1995?

The local authorities involved face difficulties. I am given to understand—that is probably the best way to put it—that they are not receiving advice from the Ministry

[Mr. Colin Shepherd]

about what they should be doing. They are therefore reluctant to compromise their arrangements. Indeed, the agendas of many local authorities are different from that of the industry.

For example, Hereford city council has a major responsibility for poultrymeat inspection. I am pleased to say that even now, at 2.10 pm, the local authority is discussing with Sun Valley the arrangements that it might be appropriate to establish. I am pleased that that is happening. That has come about as a consequence of prodding from the company, from me and from my hon. Friend the Minister.

However, certain local authorities are not rushing to sort out the problem. They take a view, like Hereford city council takes a view, that there should be a policy of no redundancies. That is not necessarily the industry's view and it is not necessarily the correct view. We should consider the industry which should be served.

I should like confirmation from my hon. Friend the Minister that the arrangements for the poultrymeat industry will go ahead flat out to remove the handicap from United Kingdom producers in terms of the poultrymeat inspection costs. My hon. Friend the Minister is as aware as I am that the problem is urgent. The charging directive is not being implemented evenly throughout the Community. It is cost neutral in the United Kingdom and, as such, I am given to understand that it works out at twice the standard figure set out in the directive.

The French, however—and I must always look across the channel because that is where the immediate threat is—are talking in terms of only 64 per cent. of standard charges. Germany, Belgium, and Holland take a standard view and pick up the difference if there is any. Spain, which is quite capable of looking to our shores to place products, implements the charging directive only in certain regions. In Ireland, the cost is below standard.

Furthermore, the directive is not even implemented in Italy, Greece, Luxembourg or Portugal. I have been assured by industry representatives—a view wider than simply that of Sun Valley—that the product in Italy is good. The inspection is good, but it is not carried out with the same bureaucratic cost as it is here. The product is not necessarily bad because it does not have the same inspection costs. It is simply cost advantaged.

I want now to consider the Medicines Act 1968 and press my hon. Friend the Minister on the Veterinary Medicines Directorate and its terms of reference. Under the 1968 Act, drugs or vaccines should comply with safety, quality and efficacy requirements. However, I find that the requirements in other countries apply only to safety and quality. Surely it is for the industry to determine what is effective in terms of cost efficacy; it is not for the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. The VMD can say whether something is safe and has the right quality, but, if it has a lot of cost, producers can make up their minds whether to use it.

At present, the United Kingdom industry is at a disadvantage in terms of Marek's disease and has had to stampede the Ministry to take steps to overcome the problem. The Minister has responded by giving the vaccine an animal test certificate, but it does not have anything more than provisional approval. With regard to Gumboro disease—we are talking about losses of broilers of 1 per cent. plus a year—the VMD is reluctant to clear the hotter vaccines that are more effective and in use in the Community at present.

With regard to infectious bronchitis and the chick anaemia virus, there is always a delay. At the same time, our competitors are able to get a better crop by using vaccines that our producers are not permitted to use. Similarly, we find that the Zoonoses directive is not in place. What pressure is being brought to bear on Community countries to put the directive in place? Sometimes we are two years ahead and that involves costs which our competitors do not have.

Those matters are important in the single market. My hon. Friend the Minister was dismissive of the report by David Gosling and published by the Templeton Fellowship. We have a price disadvantage. The Ministry estimates that to be 3·5p and the industry estimates it to be between 4p and 6p. The report cannot be neglected. The market for whole frozen birds is driven purely by price. It does not matter whether birds are marked grown, produced or whatever in England or Britain—price rules the consumer in that sector. Two items of product can be side by side on a supermarket shelf with one labelled "grown in Britain" and the other "import". The imported product does not necessarily carry the same cost as the United Kingdom bird. Different vaccines are used and that is not necessarily wrong. Different qualities of inspection are used and that is not necessarily wrong, provided the product is up to the mark. However, the price differential cannot be ignored. I make a strong plea to my hon. Friend to get the matter sorted out.

2.16 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate on an industry about which he knows a great deal and in which he is a formidable representative of the interests of an important corporation in his constituency, which, as he rightly said, provides in knock-on terms a vast amount of prosperity in the farming community of Herefordshire. The poultrymeat industry is unassisted in a way which many other parts of the industry are and it deserves every credit in sight. My hon. Friend made a forceful case on the industry's behalf and I propose to deal with that.

The poultrymeat industry is a significant sector of our agricultural industry—indeed, it can serve as a model for other sectors. Since the second world war, poultrymeat has moved from being an occasional treat for the consumer to part of our everyday diet as the volume of production has grown and prices, relative to other foods, have come down. The industry has also been highly innovative in introducing a wide range of value added and convenience foods based on poultrymeat, which has also improved the consumer's lot and range of choice. My hon. Friend was right more generally to praise the size, breadth and scope of what is an extremely important industry in our agricultural infrastructure.

As my hon. Friend said, the United Kingdom industry earned more than £100 million in exports last year. We also benefit from thriving ancillary industries, especially our producers of breeding stock who are world leaders. British poultrymeat companies are also venturing abroad

to increase their sales or engage in joint ventures. All that has been achieved without the market support mechanisms that are available to other agricultural sectors.

Of course, the industry—as my hon. Friend knows better than most of us—has not been immune from the difficulties that all businesses have experienced in the past couple of years. But just as the economy generally is looking up, so, too, are the prospects for the poultry industry. Imports, which have been a growing competitive threat in the past year or so, appear to have fallen back in recent months.

Increasingly, the multiple retailers are stocking British chicken and other poultrymeat marked as such. Feedstuff prices have also risen in sterling terms, due to devaluations in the green pound, but market prices have firmed considerably since Christmas so that margins are currently healthy.

We also have the first benefits of the CAP reform package to look forward to in July when, as my hon. Friend knows, the prices of feed grains will fall by about 25 per cent. This will mean a significant fall in the price of poultry feed and, I hope, an improvement in profitability for a hard-pressed industry.

We are concerned to create the right environment in which the industry can flourish. My hon. Friend rightly lobbied vigorously in his speech for that to happen. We accept the importance of everything that he said. For example, the poultry industry continues to benefit from our research and development programme, with particular emphasis on animal health and welfare matters.

My hon. Friend's remarks about Cargill moving to open a factory in Orleans, I understand largely to supply chicken for McDonald's, is indicative of the itinerant nature of a sophisticated industry.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: The point is that the French market is currently being supplied effectively from Hereford. Why on earth should I see it go to Orleans?

Mr. Soames: I agree with my hon. Friend. My point was that we have to create the environment to make it simply not worth Cargill's while to do so. But Cargill is a major international corporation. It is an extremely successful, well-run company. It will rightly make a shrewd commercial judgment based on several factors. I take my hon. Friend's point that the environment in Britain must be in every way conducive to Cargill not only to remain in Britain, but to enhance its investment and open other factories here.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: No. The hon. Gentleman must forgive me. This is an Adjournment debate.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is actively taking forward the Government's deregulation programme by looking to see where legislation is either unnecessary or excessive. He can be assured that we shall seek to make appropriate changes, where this is found to be the case.

There is a commonality of interests, as my hon. Friend rightly said. Our aim is to protect the rights and proper concerns of the consumer as well as those of the industry, which wants only to produce a high standard product. As he knows, we have to bear in mind the need to protect the consumer and others. So there are some areas in which the industry has to, and indeed does, accept a degree of regulation. I know that that can be seen as a problem by the industry. My hon. Friend forcefully mentioned Cargill's vice-president's remarks about regulation in Britain. But clearly in these cases the Government and *industry need to work together to seek solutions to these* problems. We spend a great deal of time listening and taking an interest in how we may better create a proper environment for the growth of businesses.

Two areas of particular concern that my hon. Friend mentioned are the meat hygiene inspection arrangements and the approval of veterinary medicines. The control dealing with poultrymeat hygiene lays down the responsibilities of the industry and the Government. That ensures that poultrymeat is produced under hygienic conditions and is inspected before it reaches the consumer. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford will know that the old EC directive on poultrymeat hygiene, dating from 1971, was replaced last year by a new directive as part of the single market programme. The United Kingdom played a leading role in negotiating what I believe are significantly improved requirements, which were welcomed by many when the directive was agreed last Christmas. Under the old directive, every bird was required to receive an official inspection by a trained poultrymeat inspector. In the United Kingdom we have abided by this requirement, but I believe that it has not always been so scrupulously observed by our competitors on the continent, as my hon. Friend said.

The new directive, however, recognises the central role that industry plays in ensuring the safety of its product. Trained members of company staff will be able to carry out on-line inspection, under the supervision of an official inspection team employed by the local authority. I noted what my hon. Friend said about Hereford city council and perhaps we can have a chat about that on another occasion. Suffice it to say that my Department is, as my hon. Friend is aware, in touch with that council.

I hope to receive very shortly the detailed recommendations of a working group, on which the industry and those responsible for enforcement were represented, on how the new arrangements should operate in practice. I hope that it will be possible to take much of what they recommend into account. When we draw up our proposals, we will ensure that their opinions are included in the directive. We will, as my hon. Friend requested, press ahead with the new arrangements with great vigour.

I understand that there have been anxieties, both in the industry about the continuing burden of inspection costs, and among poultrymeat inspectors and local authorities over the reduction in jobs which will occur in those plants where company staff assume responsibility for inspection work.

I am anxious that we should proceed with care—my hon. Friend must allow this to happen, if he will—taking account of the discussions that have already taken place, to produce detailed proposals. Those will provide a basis for producers to begin the training of their staff. They will also provide an opportunity for local authorities to discuss with their own employees, the Government and the industry how the new arrangements will be phased in and the numbers of official inspection staff who will be required in the future.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Can we be certain that when our arrangements are put into operation equivalent ones will be enforced in other European countries?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has my unequivocal guarantee that that will be our aim in all the talks. There is no point in having the single market rules unless they are enforced across the Community. He may be assured of our determination to see that that happens.

My hon. Friend also spoke about production costs being cheaper in other EC member states. He will be aware that the industry has made estimates of that sort, despite the difficulty of comparing like with like. We do not take lightly the figures that were given to us, but they are rather on the high side and include costs that are not due to Government regulation. Nor do they take account of all the costs in other member states, such as French social security charges. They take no account of the action that we have taken to eliminate the differences, such as the recently agreed directive on Zoonoses, to which my hon. Friend referred, which harmonised the testing of broiler breeding flocks, or the work that we have done on meat hygiene inspection.

My hon. Friend also referred to important issues relating to veterinary medicine, Gumboro disease and other diseases. I share his concern about the losses that those diseases can cause and the distress to the birds that can result. There is a view in the industry, however, that there are wonder vaccines out there waiting to be taken up —in some cases they are apparently already available across the channel—and that only our licensing system stands in the way. Unfortunately, that is not true and, as is so often the case in life, it is rather more complicated than that.

For more than 20 years, the need for drug companies to meet the internationally recognised licensing criteria of safety, quality and efficacy has proved its worth. That is recognised in the harmonised licensing arrangements applicable in the Community from 1 January 1993. They require that no veterinary medicines may be marketed in a member state unless a licence has been issued against those criteria by that member state. Animals and producers alike have benefited from the knowledge that licensed veterinary medicines are of good quality, safe and do the job that they are supposed to do.

By their nature, vaccines are more hazardous than other medicinal products and it is therefore essential that we establish the benefits under United Kingdom circumstances to set against any potential risks. For example, with Gumboro vaccine real safety fears still exist —the products being tested are not called "hot" vaccines for nothing. If we get it wrong, we may find that the birds' immune system is irreparably damaged—the vaccine organism spreads in large quantities to unvaccinated birds on neighbouring farms, which would make matters far worse—and that birds are subject to other harmful effects.

Not everyone agrees that those risks are worth taking. Representations have been made recently by poultry experts to the effect that Gumboro disease can be controlled by the correct administration of less virulent vaccines, together with good husbandry conditions, and that hot vaccines should not be licensed.

Nevertheless, the Veterinary Products Committee, the independent scientific body which advises Ministers, considered last week whether the existing small-scale trials with hotter vaccines should be expanded. My right hon. Friend is considering the committee's advice on this question and expects to make an announcement very shortly.

Believe me, we understand the industry's concerns. Staff at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate are committed to assessing any applications where a disease problem is known to exist as quickly as possible, and have demonstrated that in practice.

I cannot accept any criticism of the slowness of either the directorate or the licensing system. The issues involved are not straightforward and need careful consideration. There are limits to the short cuts that can and should be taken.

The Government are in no doubt, as I hope that my hon. Friend is aware, about the importance of the poultrymeat industry in his constituency and throughout the country, whether as an employer, or, as my hon. Friend eloquently said, as a major consumer of cereals. Certainly it represents a significant part of the economy.

I am confident that the industry, as it has proved in the past, has the expertise, commitment, drive and entrepreneurial flourish to continue to build on its achievements. As the economy revives, and with the forthcoming fall in feed prices, the opportunity is there to do all this. We, for our part, will do all that we can to ensure that this opportunity can be taken.

In the time remaining to us, may I say, on behalf of the great unreshuffled, what a pleasure it was to have this opportunity to debate these matters with my hon. Friend. I hope that Cargill will go from strength to strength in Herefordshire.

Legal Education (Funding)

2.30 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I had a few words with the permanent secretary to the Lord Chancellor's Department earlier today and he told me that the Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education would be replying to the debate. It may be that, following the previous debate, the Lord Chancellor's Department is chicken, but the subject I wish to raise is of great interest to the Department for Education and the Lord Chancellor's Department.

It is a commonly held perception that entrants into the legal profession come from a financially privileged background. Historically, that is true, but that damaging imbalance was addressed during the latter part of this century with welcome results.

I am a solicitor by profession and, by happy coincidence, if a little stage managed, I am wearing the Gwynedd Law Society tie today. I am proud to wear that tie as a past president of the society, but I come from anything but a financially privileged background.

I hasten to say, however, that I do come from a privileged one since I was brought up to respect all members of society, irrespective of colour, creed, religion or one's place in the peculiar class structure that is perpetuated in the British Isles. I was taught that there is good and bad in everyone and, if nurtured, the good will prevail. That thought has helped me immensely during my years in practice.

My late father was a police sergeant who left school at 15. I recall many an occasion when he told me, with a degree of touching embarrassment, that he had no formal qualifications because his parents could not afford to keep him at school. That angers me. I find the notion offensive. That unfortunate chapter in my late father's life made him determined that his children would receive a full education, come what may. My late father and my mother ensured that I went to university and law college, for which I am eternally grateful to them.

The problem that I wish to highlight in this debate is the absence of mandatory grants for students attending vocational courses to quality as solicitors and at the Bar. When I attended law school in the mid-1970s, the situation was far from rosy. Even in those days, grant funding was somewhat hit or miss.

As I have mentioned previously, my Machiavellian nature got the better of me and between university and law school I married a young teacher. In all honesty, I am not that ruthless. That was 20 years ago and that teacher is the ever-caring mother of my children and a long-suffering wife since I entered the hurly-burly of this place. Seriously, however, I know that without her salary at that time I should never have been able to enter the legal profession and I would have harboured a great sense of loss as a result.

Two weeks ago I tabled an early-day motion on the subject. It states:

"That this House notes the findings of a survey by the College of Law into students' funding and finance on the Law Society's final course 1992-93 at the College of Law showing that 48 per cent. of the respondents have less than £25 per week to spend on food, books and incidentals; further notes that the percentage of students receiving final course funding from local authorities has declined from 64 per cent. of students in 1989-90 to 24 per cent. of students in 1992-93; believes that cutbacks in local authority discretionary grants to final course law students enforces students to either self-finance their coursses or seek sponsorship from firms in the middle of a severe recession; further believes that local authority discretionary grants were and are vital to ensure that prospective law students from less well-off family backgrounds can embark on final law courses; recognises that the demise of local authority discretionary grants to final course law students may lead to a narrowing of the social class base for prospective members of the legal profession currently at law colleges; and calls on the Government to make increased funding available to local authorities to ensure that such discretionary grants are paid to final course law students."

That early-day motion bears 72 signatures drawn from all Opposition parties. A similar motion tabled recently by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) was also well supported by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House.

There are numerous arguments for mandatory grants. Over the past three years, discretionary grants for solicitors' final examinations have fallen more than 70 per cent., and currently 80 per cent. of students have to self-fund, using their own, their parents' or their firms' resources. As a result, students incur large debts.

The Trainee Solicitors Group recently surveyed institutions offering solicitors finals courses to determine levels of student debt. The group circulated 3,500 questionnaires and received 2,201 replies—an extremely large response, and indicative of student concern. Of those surveyed, 709 had debts of more than £5,000, with 145 having debts of between £5,000 and £7,500, and 147 had debts of more than £10,000. Only 61 respondents had no debts.

Another argument in favour of mandatory funding is that the current situation denies access to justice. Without adequate finance, students will be unable to practise in non-commercial areas of the law, typified by work qualifying for legal aid. Firms which practise in such areas are unable to offer salaries high enough to service or pay off large loans. Consequently, fewer new solicitors will practise in such firms, and the workload of those who remain will increase, leaving them less time to concentrate on each case. The public will have fewer firms from which to choose, and less attention will be paid to their individual cases. In my view and that of the TSG, that will deny the public access to justice and to their rights—and we cannot tolerate that in a democratic society.

The prospect of large debts will make it more difficult for those of modest means to enter the profession. Without independent finance, many students will be unable to secure the loans that they require in order to undertake professional courses and may in effect face a pre-qualification test. The legal profession must be representative of the public that it serves, but a financial pre-qualification will promote the mediocre rather than the best.

I ask for equal treatment with other professions. Doctors, architects and veterinary surgeons are guaranteed payment of their university fees during training—but not lawyers, whose funding ends after their undergraduate studies, as a consequence of the Education Act 1962. Under that legislation, all undergraduates were guaranteed payment of their fees, but postgraduate work was made the subject of discretionary local education authority grants.

Barristers' and solicitors' finals after graduation, therefore, do not qualify for mandatory grants. That

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

militates in particular against ethnic minorities and those who want to enter the profession in maturity. Recently, the TSG lobbied Parliament and I was privileged to be one of the Members of another place who addressed that group. It is clear that the Council for Legal Education and the College of Law are desperately concerned about the issue, and rightly so. The tendency to draw lawyers from privileged backgrounds will be not only perpetuated under the current system but accentuated.

The Lord Chancellor's Department is working hard to appoint the judiciary from across the social spectrum and among ethnic minorities. However, it is painfully clear that its efforts are bound to fail in the prevailing circumstances. The pool from which it can draw members of both branches of the profession has already been subjected to a process of selection, in that many potential entrants simply cannot afford to undertake legal training.

A gentleman from the Crewe area wrote to me recently, saying that he was desperate. He had obtained a master's degree in law, and had arranged to take articles with a local firm of solicitors. However, although a sparkling career doubtless lay ahead of him, he could not afford to attend college, and was therefore unable to proceed any further. I find that appalling, and I feel that I owe it to that person, and to the tens of thousands of others who have been denied their vocation in the same way, to raise this all-important shortcoming in the grant system.

Martin Wedge of Brigaton is 40 and married with a small baby. He spent 15 years as a British Telecom engineer before obtaining an upper second-class law degree at Sussex university. Sussex county council refused him a grant, and the banks refused him a loan. Having failed to fund his final course, he returned to his job, but has recently secured a new job in the industrial relations department of a local firm. He writes:

"Sussex County Council has a rule that anyone above the age of 22 who has received the mandatory first degree grant should not get any further money. I wouldn't mind if the position was the same all round the country but it's down to where you live. I didn't manage to get articles, though I applied to 30 medium-sized firms . . . I wanted to be a solicitor specialising in helping people with their industrial relations problems—giving the benefit of my expertise. I feel that I myself haven't failed, but the required financial help wasn't forthcoming. Out there there are other people who, like me, have put in a lot of time and effort. Not to get help at this last stage is a bit hard to take. Perhaps there could be a four-year package whereby the whole degree including the College course was included in the grant."

My local authority, Gwynedd county council, has a policy of paying £792 per annum towards tuition fees or 50 per cent. of the fees, whichever is the higher. It also pays a maintenance grant of £1,500 per annum, means tested on the basis of parents' income, with a £200 weighting allowance if the college is in London. The council tells me that it is constrained owing to a lack of Government funding. I have a sense of déjà vu when I utter those words. I could relate a hundred case histories involving people who, having excelled at university and obtained excellent degrees, wished to become lawyers and could not do so. The position is intolerable and unacceptable; the Government must think again.

Why should entrants to the medical profession be treated differently? Why should not lawyers have a guaranteed four years of grant funding? What is the rationale that prevents that? Is the Treasury once more wreaking havoc on the lives of thousands of people in the British Isles? If so, it behoves the Minister to tackle the Treasury and put paid to this gross injustice.

We in Wales have a highly developed sense of social justice, as well as a high regard for the benefits of education. We are always ready to make sacrifices for our children. I remind the House that no less a parliamentarian than Mr. David Lloyd George came from an ordinary background, and was in no way financially privileged. The sacrifices made by his family, particularly his brother, ensured his entry into the profession and, ultimately, the House. I had the privilege of serving as an articled clerk with Lloyd George's nephew—I nearly said, "My father knew Lloyd George", but that would be rather misleading.

I am making a serious point. I am sure that many parents are willing to make sacrifices, but, owing to severe cuts and other financial pressures, they simply cannot do so. That angers me. Parents whose children are set on a legal career, but whom they must deny that opportunity, are heartbroken and demoralised. This is clearly a retrograde step. We are back in the days of my father's youth. God forbid that legal education should be denied to the poor and open only to the well off. If that is where we are heading, the legal system will soon be brought into disrepute. The administration of justice will falter, and the rule of law itself will be threatened.

I ask the Minister to re-examine this serious problem in the interests of many thousands of people in the British Isles. If the Treasury is not forthcoming, I urge him to tackle it on the matter because that is his responsibility and that is what he is here for.

If, after liaising with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Minister concludes that he cannot deal with the problem, he will be doing a grave disservice to the public at large. I urge him to discuss the matter with the Lord Chancellor's Department and I sincerely trust and hope that he will be able to find an answer to this extremely serious problem.

2.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on his good fortune in the ballot and on the clear and forceful way in which he put his arguments. He has recently been active in the subject of financial support for law students and he has now had a reasonable chance to expand on his concerns.

Before I get into my reply, perhaps I can clarify two points. First, although I am answering for my Department, we have been in close touch with the Lord Chancellor's Department and I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to its attention.

Secondly, and perhaps rather unusually from these Benches, I must properly declare a personal interest in the subject because my elder daughter is currently taking a law degree course. However, because it is her second such course, as I shall explain in a moment, she is not personally eligible for a mandatory award. She intends to go on into the legal profession.

I begin with the legal position and record, for the hon. Gentleman's benefit, as he has already acknowledged, the fact that a number of other hon. Members have recently shown a considerable interest in the subject, both in the

early-day motion and in correspondence, with particular reference to the vocational training that law students must undergo before they can practise as solicitors or barristers.

It would be helpful and fitting, given the subject, if I began with the current legal position on support for law students from England and Wales. There is an important distinction to be drawn at the outset in the support arrangements for students in higher education. In general, personally eligible students on full-time and sandwich courses at first-degree level are entitled to a mandatory award from their local education authority and can apply to the Student Loans Company for loans. These entitlements arise from the Education Act 1962 for mandatory awards and the Education (Student Loans) Act 1990 for loans. They apply to students on full-time courses leading to the so-called degree comparable qualifications—the diploma of higher education and the higher national diploma—and to all courses of initial teacher training. For both awards and loans, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State makes national regulations that govern the rates and conditions.

Other students in higher education—those on courses above first-degree level, most of those on part-time courses and students in further education—do not have those entitlements. Students who, after their first degree, take professional law courses—the Law Society finals, the legal practice course for those intending to practise as solicitors and the vocational course for intending barristers at the inns of court school of law—come within the latter broad category. Students taking higher degree courses at masters level and beyond can apply for a competitive post-graduate award from one of the national award-making bodies, such as one of the research councils, depending on subject. For courses not covered by these national selective schemes, which include professional law courses, students can, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, apply to their local education authority for a discretionary award.

Students on post-graduate courses at institutions that receive recurrent grant from public funds can apply for help if they are in serious financial difficulty from the post-graduate access funds held by the institutions.

There are no national regulations for local education authority discretionary awards. It is for each of the 117 LEAs in England and Wales to decide its own policies on which students and courses to support and the amount of support to offer in each case. Hon. Members will recall that these are, after all, discretionary awards. Ministers do not, as a matter of principle, seek to influence LEAs' decisions or policies on them; they would cease to be discretionary if we did.

I have explained the current legal position in some detail so that the House can see what is the practical scope for action within it. Of course, I concede that it would be open to the Government to contemplate bringing the necessary legislation before Parliament to change the current position. We would, however, need to consider the substantial cost to the taxpayer of extending mandatory awards and student loans across the whole range of students taking postgraduate courses. Clearly, any such extension could not be confined only to postgraduate law students. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that we have no plans to make such a costly change.

There are some very important points which I should like to make about mandatory support. First, it is available to eligible students on first degree courses, irrespective of the subject they are studying. Secondly, it is available in accordance with the relevant regulations until the course has been completed, regardless of the course length, but it is aimed at enabling each eligible student to undertake one higher education course up to first degree level. It is not intended to finance students to undertake a succession of courses to reach the level of education or qualification which is needed to enter their chosen profession. As I said in my opening remarks, my own daughter is affected by this policy.

It is misleading to suggest—as I am sorry to say that the Trainee Solicitors Group seems to be suggesting—that law students are somehow singled out and do not have the same entitlements to mandatory awards and student loans as first degree students in other subjects. Let me say clearly that that is not the case. Students taking first degree courses in law are treated absolutely on a par with their peers in other subjects. Most of the law students who go on to take postgraduate law courses of the types that I mentioned earlier will have already benefited from their entitlement to mandatory support while taking their first degree. However, like some other professions, any professional training that they undertake after their first degree falls outside the scope of the mandatory scheme.

I know that some universities and the Law Society itself are currently looking at new structures for first degree law courses. More widely and in the longer term, the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct is reviewing the structure and funding of training for barristers and solicitors. Universities are considering new four-year integrated degree courses which will include the vocational training element currently taken as a separate course after graduating.

As the regulations currently stand, such courses will attract mandatory awards and student loans in the same way as medical courses, which incorporate some professional training en route to the first degree. While acknowledging that it is for universities to decide which courses to offer and how to construct them, I make two points.

First, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has often expressed his concern about the trend towards longer degree courses. It is a trend which reduces the number of people who can enter higher education within the available resources. He has asked the Higer Education Funding Council for England to advise him on funding measures which would remove any incentive to lengthen degree courses at the expense of student numbers. The council has recently issued a circular to institutions indicating that it proposes to put in place from 1994-95 an element of output-related funding to discourage the lengthening of courses.

Secondly, we would be concerned if these integrated degree courses in law—or, for that matter, any other subjects—became widespread as a device to obtain mandatory support for postgraduate vocational training. That would be contrary to the intentions of the current legislation and it would replace private or discretionary funding for vocational training with automatic Exchequer support. I am not convinced that such a switch is a desirable use of taxpayers' money.

Concerns have been expressed by the hon. Gentleman and others about the narrow social base for law students and the low numbers of students from ethnic minorities on postgraduate law courses. These are primarily matters for the profession itself to tackle. While I understand the

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

concerns, there are other and better ways of resolving them than through the national arrangements for student support.

I deal now with discretionary awards. There have been recurring press reports in the past two or three years that LEAs have cut, or even stopped, discretionary awards. The hon. Gentleman mentioned some evidence from the Trainee Solicitors Group. I have not yet seen it, and I should be grateful if he would submit it to us for consideration. There have already been surveys and reports by a number of interested bodies, including the Law Society and the College of Law, which have highlighted the effect of cuts in support for their students. I am bound to say that a somewhat different story is told in the figures which my Department routinely collects each year from local education authorities. They show a steady rise each year in LEAs' expenditure when one looks at the national aggregate totals. And there was a sizeable rise in expenditure nationally for the academic year 1991-92.

I accept that the Department's figures are, in the nature of things, collected after the end of the year to which they relate. It is true that national statistics can conceal wide variations at local level. The position on the ground at the moment is varied and unclear. There is anecdotal evidence that some LEAs are reducing their discretionary awards provision generally. Others are said to be selectively withdrawing support from more expensive courses, including perhaps postgraduate law courses. In contrast, some LEAs are actually increasing their overall awards budgets, while others are continuing to grant awards at about the same level from year to year. We have yet to see firm evidence of the overall picture.

I am pleased, therefore, that the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Sir John Cass's Foundation, with financial support from my Department and the Further Education Funding Council, have commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to conduct a survey of local education authorities' discretionary awards policies and practices. It will provide up-to-date information about the full range of their discretionary awards provision, including that for postgraduate law students. The results of the survey should be available to the foundations later in the summer and I look forward to seeing them.

Concern has been voiced that some LEAs may be withdrawing entirely from making discretionary awards. We shall continue to monitor the situation. In my view, it would be unlawful for an LEA to adopt such a policy because this would amount to fettering its own discretion. A policy of "no awards come what may" is not acceptable. Nor, in the Government's view, should there be any need for such a policy in a properly managed authority and I shall explain why.

It has been suggested that, in some way, Government funding—or the absence of it—has forced LEAs to cut back drastically on their discretionary award provision. I cannot accept that. The Government already contribute large sums from taxation to local authorities for them to use throughout the educational field, including discretionary awards.

Taking my responsibilities for education in England, the 1993-94 local authority finance settlement allowed for a 2·6 per cent. increase over the previous year's settlement after changes in functions have been taken into account. The figure for Wales is somewhat different, representing an increase in provision of 20 per cent. over the two years 1991-92 and 1993-94. Given the prospect of low pay settlements and low inflation, it is a fair increase.

Of course there are many pressures on the education service at present, and an endless succession of bids for more funding. However, any authority which manages its affairs well and achieves efficiency in its administrative costs should be able to continue to provide a high quality education service which meets the needs of the people of its area, including their needs for an appropriate range of discretionary awards.

Within the national funding framework that I have just described, it is for each LEA to set its own budget and to decide how to allocate it between the various elements of the service, including discretionary awards. If some see fit to alter their priorities and redeploy funds from one area to another, that is their decision, but in considering restructuring their spending they must consider where economies may best be made, taking account of the likely effect on pupils and students.

Let us also not lose sight of the fact that support for students is not confined to cash from the public purse. There are other sources such as charitable foundations, professional bodies and grant-making trusts which are prepared to help students. Some commercial organisations offer sponsorship and bursaries to those, including their employees, on certain courses. High street banks are often prepared to help, and there is the possibility of career development loans sponsored by the Department of Employment.

Of course, I am sure that the law profession itself—the Bar Council, the Law Society and the practitioners—will want to do as much as it can to help law students, if only from enlightened self-interest. I understand that both branches of the profession have already demonstrated their concern that young lawyers at the start of their working careers should have an adequate income.

Even so, it is interesting to note the findings of a survey by the College of Law earlier this year into its students' finances. It found that only a minority of respondents received support from their potential employers. It also found, tellingly, that the majority of students applied for help to their LEA and that almost half of them received some assistance.

I believe therefore that there is proper scope for public and private funding to continue to work together to help law students to undertake the vocational training for entry to the profession. I have taken careful note of what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I can assure him and the House that I shall keep a careful watch on developments in that important area.

Royal Assent

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Charities Act 1993
Clean Air Act 1993
Radioactive Substances Act 1993
Carrying of Knives, etc. (Scotland) Act 1993
Disability (Grants) Act 1993

Protection of Animals (Scotland) Act 1993
Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Act 1993
Non-Domestic Rating Act 1993
Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Act 1993
Midland Metro Act 1993
Midland Metro (No. 2) Act 1993
London Docklands Railway (Lewisham) Act 1993
London Docklands Railway (Lewisham) (No. 2) Act 1993

It being Three o'clock, Madam Deputy Speaker adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Resolutions [14 and 18 May], till Monday 7 June.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 17 May 1993

TRANSPORT

Buses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the average age of buses in each of the last seven years.

Mr. Freeman: The average age of Hackney buses and coaches with nine or more seats in Great Britain licensed at the end of each of the last seven years is given in the table.

Average age.

Year	*Years*
1986	7·8
1987	8·0
1988	8·2
1989	8·3
1990	8·4
1991	8·8
1992	9·2

Source: DVLA.

Aircraft Security

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to ensure that the Civil Aviation Authority enforces, and that British registered airlines comply with, the security regulations in regard to the quantity of baggage permitted to be brought into aircraft cabins.

Mr. Norris: The CAA recently issued a notice reminding aircraft and aerodrome operators of the measures available to them for restricting the excessive carriage of cabin baggage and of their duty to comply with them in the interest of passenger safety. The authority will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the regulations are adhered to.

Bus Services, London

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bus routes in London have been put out to tender; what savings have resulted; and how many of these tenders were won by London Buses.

Mr. Norris: London Transport operates some 650 bus routes in London. Of these, 268 have been competitively tendered, with London Buses winning 132. LT estimates that tendering has produced average costs savings, net of administration costs, of 15 per cent.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will be responsible for responding to requests from residents' groups on residential estates in London to discuss the introduction of a bus service.

Mr. Norris: London Transport has a general duty under the London Regional Transport Act 1984 to provide or secure the provision of public passenger services for Greater London. It has no statutory obligation to respond to approaches from residents' groups, but such organisations are free to approach LT direct to discuss future bus provision.

Privilege Rail Tickets

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of privilege rail tickets granted under reciprocal arrangements to employees of overseas railway administrations for travel within Great Britain in 1991-92.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail advises that it issued 57,023 coupons for such travel on its services in the calendar year 1991. It is not known how many of these were actually used.

Bus Operators

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the publicly or municipally-owned bus operators that are excluded from submitting tenders for the provision of services in Great Britain.

Mr. Freeman: All publicly or municipally owned bus operators are free to submit tenders to provide bus services.

Robin Hood Line

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Government will be making additional funding available for the Robin Hood line between Nottingham and Mansfield.

Mr. Freeman: The Government will be making available to Nottinghamshire county council additional resources of £6·5 million for stage 2 of the Robin Hood line. These resources are in addition to the £367,000 which the Government have already made available towards the costs of stage 1 of the line. The additional resources should make it possible to extend the Robin Hood line from Nottingham at least as far as Mansfield.

Taxis

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had with the National Association of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Enforcement Officers regarding two-tier taxi licensing systems, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: My officials met the National Association of Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Enforcement Officers on 5 May to discuss the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles, principally outside London. NAPTHELO gave the Department copies of its draft proposals for the future of the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing system which we will be studying with interest.

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken on the recommendations contained in paragraph 23 of the report of the working party on the safety of users of taxis and minicabs in London.

Mr. Norris: I am aware of the situation outside London where there is a two-tier system for licensing taxis and private hire vehicles. I will take experience of this into account in making a decision on any changes to the licensing regime for the capital.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is as follows:

Month	*Number of Parliamentary questions answered*	*Number of disproportionate cost answers*	*Percentage*
November 1991	392	2	0·51
December 1991	173	0	—
January 1992	223	0	—
February 1992	371	1	0·26
March 1992	172	0	—
April 1992	General Election	—	—
May 1992	170	0	—
June 1992	359	2	0·55
July 1992	259	1	0·38
August 1992	Recess	0	—
September 1992	Recess	0	—
October 1992	205	1	0·48
November 1992	334	1	0·29
December 1992	181	1	0·55
January 1993	196	2	1·02
February 1993	418	0	—
March 1993	392	0	—
April 1993	213	1	0·48
Total	4,058	12	0·29

Third Thames Crossing

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what cost-benefit analysis was used in selecting his Department's preferred option of a bridge, rather than a tunnel, for the A102 Blackwall third crossing; what emphasis this cost-benefit analysis gave to the impact of a bridge on the local community, business and the environment; if his Department will publish the cost-benefit analysis in full in time for the consultation phase; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Department has a standard cost benefit analysis for assessment of the effects of new road schemes in urban conditions—URECA—which addresses the likely change in traffic conditions and therefore the effect on the local community. The scheme's technical appraisal, which contains a summary of this analysis, is available and I will send the hon. Gentleman a copy if he wishes.

A formal environmental assessment is not prepared in the early stages of a scheme. Full details of the preferred bridge option for a new crossing at Blackwall, including landscaping proposals, air quality and noise pollution assessments, were included in public exhibitions held recently as part of the current public consultation exercise.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he had with local government, community and business organisations prior to publication of his Department's consultation document on the A102 Blackwall third crossing; and how many of the organisations that he met were in favour of the Department's preferred bridge option.

Mr. Norris: Earlier this year the Department consulted on an informal basis the London boroughs of Greenwich and of Tower Hamlets and the London Docklands development corporation. It also had similar informal consultations with British Gas because of its wide-ranging Port Greenwich development proposals on its land at Blackwall peninsula and with industrialists on the north bank. The recent, widely advertised public consultation exercise is the opportunity for all interested parties to comment. Not surprisingly, the bridge option has received a mixed reaction.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a detailed environmental assessment, including analysis of noise pollution, of the planned bridge at Blackwall.

Mr. Norris: A formal environmental assessment is not prepared in the early stages of a scheme. Full details of the preferred bridge option for a new crossing at Blackwall, including landscaping proposals, air quality and noise pollution assessments, were included in public exhibitions held recently as part of the current public consultation exercise.

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has recently received any communication from the European Commission with regard to Oxleas wood in Woolwich; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: I have recently received the European Commission's reasoned opinion on the east London river crossing. We will study it carefully but remain confident that we will be able to persuade the Commission of the merits of our case.

M6

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was paid for the land at Red Star which was bought for widening the M6 at Fulwood in Preston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department does not disclose information about individual compensation claims.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of cases were discontinued by the crown prosecution service on the grounds of *(a)* evidential insufficiency or *(b)* it being not in the public interest to continue for each year since the instigation of the crown prosecution service.

The Attorney-General: Reasons for discontinuance are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The total numbers of defendant cases discontinued in each year were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987-88	108,900
1988-89	120,714
1989-90	140,313
1990-91	151,236
1991-92	174,411
1992-93	193,774

The interim findings of Home Office research into the reasons for the termination of cases included 54 per cent. terminated on evidential grounds and 32 per cent. terminated in the public interest.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases were *(a)* received by the crown prosecution service from police, *(b)* completed in the magistrates court, *(c)* discontinued by the crown prosecution service before or at the magistrates court hearing, *(d)* committed to the Crown court by the magistrates court or *(e)* otherwise disposed for each year since the instigation of the crown prosecution service in each crown prosecution service region.

The Attorney-General: The tables show the numbers of defendant cases in each category dealt with in the 31 areas of the crown prosecution service for each year since April 1987. Cases received for pre-charge advice are also shown. "Other proceedings", such as forfeiture under the Obscene Publications Act, have been recorded separately since 1991.

Table 1
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1987-88

	Received[1]	*Finalised*	*of which:*				
			Advice only	*Completed in Magistrates' Courts*	*Discontinued*	*Committed to Crown Court*	*Other Disposals*
Inner London	92,761	172,251	1,825	111,506	7,208	16,162	35,550
London North	41,369	75,557	1,425	46,379	4,895	8,709	14,149
London South	35,900	67,720	1,670	50,677	5,749	6,236	3,388
Avon/Somerset	18,373	35,649	1,234	28,099	2,138	3,417	761
Herts/Bedfordshire	16,029	28,091	1,465	21,441	1,942	2,239	1,004
Cambridge/Lincolnshire	14,791	28,914	916	23,182	1,783	2,396	637
Cheshire	11,849	24,956	1,423	19,248	1,754	1,765	736
Cleveland/ North Yorkshire	18,808	37,889	3,554	27,296	2,390	3,024	1,625
Cumbria/Lancashire	31,247	64,617	12,125	41,663	4,430	4,773	1,626
Derbyshire	13,666	29,377	730	24,390	1,789	1,977	491
Devon/Cornwall	16,433	31,040	2,409	23,336	2,837	2,211	247
Dorset/Hampshire	26,960	51,736	1,663	40,369	4,113	4,753	838
Durham/Northumbria	33,070	62,742	2,124	41,703	4,659	7,030	7,226
North Wales	16,263	29,036	1,069	23,534	2,249	1,425	759
Essex	14,671	27,554	223	21,299	2,908	2,311	813
Gloster/Wiltshire	14,090	27,237	633	21,677	2,299	1,858	770
Greater Manchester	46,451	82,736	689	64,604	6,249	8,565	2,629
Gwent/South Wales	37,610	70,943	2,023	55,724	7,010	4,315	1,871
Humberside	11,753	25,095	1,049	18,483	1,019	3,421	1,123
Kent	17,872	37,448	997	28,444	3,798	3,423	786
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	21,223	36,919	607	28,012	3,018	3,471	1,811
Merseyside	25,296	48,442	821	35,456	4,415	5,460	2,290
Norfolk/Suffolk	18,656	36,066	2,510	27,698	2,578	1,952	1,328
Nottinghamshire	17,560	37,200	843	33,064	890	2,955	[2]552
South Yorkshire	19,933	36,511	1,624	26,610	2,483	4,207	1,587
Staffordshire/Warwickshire	19,934	37,446	2,196	28,461	2,937	2,788	1,064
Sussex	20,242	41,593	1,791	32,375	4,622	2,289	516
Thames Valley	26,708	45,981	3,110	36,271	2,584	3,008	1,008
West Mercia	12,877	27,148	1,163	20,352	2,052	2,269	1,312
West Midlands	38,060	70,346	2,210	53,333	2,453	8,900	3,450
West Yorkshire	35,878	72,732	639	52,799	9,649	7,584	2,061
Total Field	786,333	1,500,972	56,760	1,107,485	108,900	134,923	92,904

[1] October 1987 to March 1988 only.
[2] Minus value.

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

The minus value for Other Disposals in the Nottinghamshire Area is produced because the sum of advice only, completed, discontinued and committed to the Crown Court cases is greater than the total number of cases recorded as finalised. This result is produced because of limitations in administrative arrangements for obtaining the basic data in the Area at that time. The occurrence of such circumstances is now avoided by validity checks and controls which have since been introduced.

Table 2
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1988-89

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals
Inner London	176,686	169,844	1,263	107,070	10,683	16,073	34,755
London North	83,399	74,351	1,363	47,041	5,978	9,321	10,648
London South	73,715	73,877	1,712	52,558	6,839	6,036	6,732
Avon/Somerset	38,258	37,629	1,065	29,775	2,573	3,076	1,140
Herts/Bedfordshire	32,735	31,600	1,946	24,167	2,211	2,612	664
Cambridge/Lincolnshire	28,438	25,930	1,132	19,565	1,864	2,419	950
Cheshire	24,291	23,850	1,093	18,400	2,055	1,951	351
Cleveland/ North Yorkshire	38,637	35,958	2,327	26,500	2,435	3,271	1,425
Cumbria/Lancashire	57,891	58,937	7,310	41,361	3,648	5,079	1,539
Derbyshire	24,487	24,510	2,418	18,014	1,653	2,147	278
Devon/Cornwall	31,393	31,521	2,510	23,457	2,419	1,875	1,260
Dorset/Hampshire	59,983	57,588	1,474	46,198	3,759	4,660	1,497
Durham/Northumbria	67,852	64,376	2,827	41,463	5,778	6,476	7,832
North Wales	32,068	30,284	1,038	24,273	2,793	1,558	622
Essex	30,179	30,193	469	21,549	3,572	2,433	2,170
Gloster/Wiltshire	25,960	26,156	884	20,321	2,492	1,731	728
Greater Manchester	94,678	89,938	2,209	68,370	8,207	8,622	2,530
Gwent/South Wales	72,264	70,254	2,361	53,192	7,307	4,325	3,069
Humberside	27,276	26,591	1,320	19,309	1,715	3,458	789
Kent	34,392	34,807	1,116	26,216	3,719	2,999	757
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	38,384	35,616	1,022	28,046	3,186	2,487	875
Merseyside	51,872	50,438	815	38,133	4,419	5,225	1,846
Norfolk/Suffolk	37,690	37,247	3,075	29,091	2,660	2,284	137
Nottinghamshire	38,507	36,464	618	30,304	956	3,324	1,262
South Yorkshire	44,934	41,685	5,045	28,502	2,866	4,101	1,171
Staffordshire/Warwickshire	40,008	38,935	1,897	29,351	3,236	3,012	1,439
Sussex	34,598	34,527	2,480	24,671	2,385	2,456	2,535
Thames Valley	48,547	45,479	3,189	34,056	2,748	3,051	2,435
West Mercia	26,777	25,946	932	20,567	2,241	1,787	419
West Midlands	79,276	77,450	2,125	61,123	3,029	8,526	2,647
West Yorkshire	78,941	66,367	603	45,877	11,288	7,352	1,247
Total Field	1,574,116	1,508,348	59,638	1,098,520	120,714	133,727	95,749

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Table 3
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1989-90

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals
Inner London	166,374	169,577	2,522	105,622	12,756	16,497	32,180
London North	82,137	73,167	1,920	46,689	7,236	8,484	8,838
London South	67,902	71,849	1,816	48,947	6,925	5,757	8,404
Avon/Somerset	37,910	38,190	1,225	29,238	2,965	2,918	1,844
Herts/Bedfordshire	32,376	32,535	1,851	23,836	2,694	2,565	1,589
Cambridge/Lincolnshire	32,495	30,527	1,020	23,591	2,410	2,559	947
Cheshire	25,452	24,749	1,143	18,664	2,369	1,978	595
Cleveland/ North Yorkshire	36,699	36,378	2,964	25,802	2,816	3,272	1,524
Cumbria/Lancashire	61,369	58,902	2,924	44,422	4,555	5,272	1,729
Derbyshire	26,755	25,840	4,264	17,096	1,798	2,282	400
Devon/Cornwall	34,051	33,937	2,320	25,240	2,518	2,606	1,253
Dorset/Hampshire	63,602	61,892	1,853	48,706	3,826	5,098	2,409
Durham/Northumbria	68,322	65,455	2,441	42,777	7,602	5,141	7,494
North Wales	34,621	32,937	865	26,121	3,477	1,597	877
Essex	34,542	34,109	176	24,359	4,592	2,432	2,550
Gloster/Wiltshire	28,221	27,270	840	20,857	2,989	1,626	958
Greater Manchester	101,713	98,186	3,099	74,557	9,143	7,756	3,631
Gwent/South Wales	76,175	71,402	3,721	52,209	8,311	4,787	2,374
Humberside	26,797	26,430	1,223	19,343	2,047	3,059	758
Kent	36,291	36,180	1,253	26,921	4,081	3,193	732
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	35,756	33,427	797	24,999	3,186	2,812	1,633
Merseyside	60,932	56,517	841	43,944	4,324	4,896	2,512
Norfolk/Suffolk	39,843	38,450	2,885	29,984	2,702	2,595	284
Nottinghamshire	41,323	39,371	894	32,848	1,674	2,811	1,144

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals
South Yorkshire	48,632	46,277	5,669	31,325	3,468	4,188	1,627
Staffordshire/Warwickshire	45,379	43,401	1,665	32,672	3,878	3,420	1,766
Sussex	36,267	35,364	1,641	25,567	2,737	2,562	2,857
Thames Valley	49,572	49,830	2,331	32,833	2,726	2,700	9,240
West Mercia	26,363	26,149	932	20,558	2,568	1,825	266
West Midlands	80,785	77,601	1,806	59,803	4,621	8,586	2,785
West Yorkshire	82,691	79,148	5,223	50,850	13,319	7,473	2,283
Total Field	1,622,347	1,575,047	64,124	1,130,380	140,313	132,747	107,483

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Table 4
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1990-91

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals
Inner London	149,066	154,355	2,518	90,613	12,507	15,997	32,720
London North	79,181	80,764	2,260	48,806	8,350	8,274	13,074
London South	65,872	65,781	1,882	43,195	6,775	6,121	7,808
Avon/Somerset	37,379	37,139	1,247	28,560	3,295	2,667	1,370
Herts/Bedfordshire	32,858	34,002	1,731	23,002	3,018	2,032	4,219
Cambridge/Lincolnshire	31,521	30,363	1,090	22,933	2,906	2,689	745
Cheshire	25,526	24,440	1,055	18,491	2,423	1,921	550
Cleveland/ North Yorkshire	38,070	36,286	2,119	25,948	3,117	3,612	1,490
Cumbria/Lancashire	63,795	59,425	1,946	43,834	5,118	6,184	2,343
Derbyshire	24,356	23,549	2,517	16,410	1,743	2,190	689
Devon/Cornwall	33,629	33,169	1,797	25,139	2,730	2,618	885
Dorset/Hampshire	62,045	61,971	1,180	48,603	3,784	5,531	2,873
Durham/Northumbria	73,573	71,632	2,725	46,092	9,319	5,425	8,071
North Wales	37,353	35,587	708	28,531	3,983	1,752	613
Essex	37,378	37,346	561	22,638	4,828	2,642	6,677
Gloster/Wiltshire	29,938	29,526	722	22,400	3,637	1,923	844
Greater Manchester	103,485	98,847	3,242	77,492	9,226	7,323	1,564
Gwent/South Wales	80,708	80,575	4,135	58,331	8,910	5,246	3,953
Humberside	27,952	27,283	1,407	19,269	1,999	3,282	1,326
Kent	33,685	34,183	1,276	24,030	4,844	3,266	767
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	36,957	38,676	922	28,211	4,128	2,870	2,545
Merseyside	61,576	58,631	671	44,591	5,236	4,800	3,333
Norfolk/Suffolk	38,674	37,232	3,453	26,968	3,142	2,561	1,108
Nottinghamshire	41,615	42,852	589	35,018	1,632	2,827	2,786
South Yorkshire	51,699	53,383	5,518	37,773	3,991	4,345	1,756
Staffordshire/Warwickshire	44,463	43,132	1,674	31,393	4,048	3,410	2,607
Sussex	35,943	35,466	1,572	25,590	2,627	2,899	2,778
Thames Valley	48,018	49,072	2,346	33,314	3,915	2,990	6,507
West Mercia	27,241	26,392	1,175	20,510	2,511	1,959	237
West Midlands	78,970	80,803	1,272	62,133	5,146	8,025	4,227
West Yorkshire	92,531	90,567	17,441	50,491	12,348	7,306	2,981
Total Field	1,625,057	1,612,429	72,751	1,130,309	151,236	134,687	123,446

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Table 5
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1991-92

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals	Other Proceedings
Inner London	147,693	145,829	2,421	85,120	19,029	14,383	23,867	1,009
London North	79,637	74,897	2,233	47,219	11,778	7,480	5,307	880
London South	60,768	60,537	1,932	39,940	7,674	5,609	4,961	421
Avon/Somerset	36,472	36,832	1,074	25,461	4,550	3,042	2,174	531
Herts/Bedfordshire	31,273	33,392	2,272	20,148	4,228	1,597	4,383	764
Cambridge/Lincolnshire	29,788	28,562	1,311	20,291	3,142	2,668	908	242
Cheshire	24,766	24,901	849	17,792	2,701	2,050	850	652

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals	Other Proceedings
Cleveland/North Yorkshire	39,989	39,471	1,686	25,401	4,371	3,865	2,149	2,000
Cumbria/Lancashire	61,855	61,726	2,428	43,100	5,914	6,293	3,625	366
Derbyshire	24,801	25,054	4,031	14,984	1,595	1,958	2,144	343
Devon/Cornwall	33,194	34,170	1,297	25,541	2,747	2,271	1,898	416
Dorset/Hampshire	63,300	65,363	1,524	49,598	4,862	5,135	3,497	747
Durham/Northumbria	67,866	66,196	2,235	44,431	9,825	5,575	3,561	569
North Wales	38,774	37,161	810	28,426	3,693	1,670	2,028	534
Essex	41,888	38,387	1,454	27,537	3,333	2,410	3,319	414
Gloucestershire/ Wiltshire	32,823	32,991	964	23,292	3,826	1,818	2,570	521
Greater Manchester	102,983	102,507	2,624	71,969	9,904	7,818	6,410	3,782
Gwent/South Wales	76,878	76,416	4,147	53,035	8,648	5,089	4,262	1,235
Humberside	26,238	26,158	1,557	17,702	1,792	3,109	743	1,255
Kent	29,179	29,907	1,072	19,502	4,848	3,025	1,182	278
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	37,856	42,023	1,288	28,766	3,807	3,162	4,537	1,046
Merseyside	56,711	61,230	762	44,812	6,428	5,321	3,453	454
Norfolk/Suffolk	38,188	38,695	3,254	27,715	3,434	2,706	1,200	384
Nottinghamshire	28,302	32,536	577	22,877	4,339	2,482	1,767	394
South Yorkshire	43,538	47,227	5,317	28,105	4,652	4,322	4,343	197
Staffordshire/ Warwickshire	45,059	45,261	2,068	32,713	4,643	3,404	1,696	737
Sussex	36,194	36,320	1,878	25,557	3,664	2,709	2,145	366
Thames Valley	41,994	41,889	2,342	28,095	5,717	2,810	2,394	530
West Mercia	25,094	26,379	1,748	18,444	2,829	1,652	1,310	359
West Midlands	77,827	70,992	709	50,197	7,984	7,028	4,184	890
West Yorkshire	90,247	85,844	15,473	50,877	8,454	7,206	3,408	436
Total Field	1,571,175	1,568,853	73,337	1,058,747	174,411	129,667	110,275	22,752

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Table 6
Magistrates' Courts Cases 1992-93

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals	Other Proceedings
Inner London	146,480	148,352	2,749	80,785	22,538	11,440	29,075	1,765
London North	76,838	73,918	3,781	44,749	12,284	5,556	6,498	1,050
London South	58,390	58,182	2,322	37,363	8,481	4,720	4,845	451
Avon/Somerset	34,379	34,049	1,283	22,485	4,549	2,650	2,611	471
Herts/Bedfordshire	30,415	30,408	1,814	19,159	3,881	1,787	2,757	1,010
Cambridge/ Lincolnshire	31,326	28,325	1,669	20,255	3,328	2,173	720	180
Cheshire	26,300	25,749	1,478	17,752	2,653	1,976	951	939
Cleveland/North Yorkshire	40,663	40,418	2,135	26,210	5,480	3,655	1,636	1,302
Cumbria/Lancashire	62,616	61,486	2,398	43,497	6,625	5,097	3,281	588
Derbyshire	23,285	23,613	3,967	14,200	2,062	1,711	1,386	287
Devon/Cornwall	30,174	30,985	1,428	23,106	2,659	2,026	1,394	372
Dorset/Hampshire	58,043	59,271	1,750	43,874	4,724	3,913	4,330	680
Durham/Northumbria	68,353	69,382	2,151	44,856	12,478	4,748	4,656	493
North Wales	36,250	36,436	1,218	27,077	4,175	1,665	1,757	544
Essex	39,869	41,670	2,030	28,385	3,064	1,974	6,065	152
Gloucestershire/ Wiltshire	33,417	33,434	1,168	22,858	3,835	1,496	3,014	1,063
Greater Manchester	105,716	103,350	2,382	71,911	10,541	7,568	6,202	4,746
Gwent/South Wales	75,537	77,529	5,083	50,273	9,395	4,684	6,647	1,447
Humberside	24,139	24,042	1,382	16,536	1,949	2,320	379	1,476
Kent	28,463	27,643	1,125	17,907	4,865	2,366	1,156	224
Leicester/ Northamptonshire	38,202	40,406	2,334	26,174	4,773	3,104	2,973	1,048
Merseyside	54,586	56,090	1,099	41,584	5,960	4,835	2,238	374
Norfolk/Suffolk	36,760	37,951	3,484	26,610	3,156	2,244	1,651	806
Nottinghamshire	27,794	28,837	523	19,876	4,083	2,530	1,501	324
South Yorkshire	39,155	39,885	5,257	22,839	6,342	3,106	2,049	292
Staffordshire/ Warwickshire	46,806	45,895	2,741	33,027	4,981	2,872	1,383	891
Sussex	32,739	32,186	1,719	22,082	4,011	2,049	2,038	287
Thames Valley	45,320	45,489	3,108	28,714	6,201	2,449	4,231	786

	Received	Finalised	of which: Advice only	Completed in Magistrates' Courts	Discontinued	Committed to Crown Court	Other Disposals	Other Proceedings
West Mercia	27,614	26,977	1,198	19,200	3,833	1,544	908	294
West Midlands	76,593	74,305	1,545	48,616	9,986	6,524	6,095	1,539
West Yorkshire	74,364	76,249	6,228	48,403	10,882	7,300	3,212	224
Total Field	1,530,586	1,532,512	72,549	1,010,363	193,774	112,082	117,639	26,105

Other disposals comprise committal hearings in which the defendant was discharged, cases where the defendant was bound over to keep the peace, instances where the defendant cannot be found, and other cases where the prosecution cannot proceed (e.g. through the death of the defendant).

Mr. Blair: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment his Department has made of the proportion of victims who are consulted when a case is discontinued by the crown prosecution service.

The Attorney-General: The crown prosecution service does not consult victims directly. Where appropriate the victim's views are made known to the CPS through the police, who are consulted before a case is discontinued and to whom the victims charter assigns the role of keeping victims informed about proceedings. The interests of the victim are an important factor in determining the balance of the public interest.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Profit-related Pay

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the estimated cost in 1991-92 and 1992-93 of tax forgone by the Inland Revenue through profit-related pay schemes.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest information is as follows:

Estimated cost of income tax relief

	£ million
1991-92	40
[1]1992-93	200

[1] Provisional.

Self-employed People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many self-employed people in Wales have claimed tax relief on personal pension payments in each of the last three years; and if he will indicate in each instance the number who have claimed the maximum amount of tax relief available.

Mr. Dorrell: In 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91, the most recent three years available, the estimated numbers of self-employed people in Wales claiming relief on pension payments are 50,000, 60,000 and 70,000 respectively. Reliable information on numbers claiming the maximum relief is not available.

Rugby Football

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Inland Revenue has made of the implications of the Rugby Football Union report entitled "Inducements to Move, Incentives to Stay and Other Illegal Payments", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue is aware of the Rugby Football Union report. It is making inquiries to establish whether any players have received taxable income or benefits which they have not declared. It will take appropriate action when its inquiries are completed.

Water Expenditure

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie the differential categorisation of borrowing for water supply purposes by Scottish, English and Welsh local authorities as respect Government expenditure; and what plans he has to bring the positions into line.

Mr. Portillo: In Scotland expenditure by local authorities on water and sewerage is subject to the same controls as other capital expenditure. No distinction is made between borrowing for water supply and for other local authority capital projects.

English and Welsh local authorities have no statutory responsibility for developing and maintaining water supplies, except in the Isles of Scilly and do not therefore need to borrow to finance capital investment. Supplementary credit approvals are issued by the Department of the Environment for capital expenditure in connection with the provision of supplies in the Isles of Scilly.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Nelson: Relatively few parliamentary questions are not answered substantively by Treasury Ministers on ground of disproportionate cost.

Overseas Contracts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy towards British subjects working on contracts in the middle east for United Kingdom companies whose salary is administered in Britain for income tax and national insurance contributions.

Mr. Dorrell: The tax treatment of United Kingdom citizens working abroad for United Kingdom companies, whether in the middle east or elsewhere, depends on a number of factors, including their residence status for United Kingdom tax purposes; and the terms of any relevant double taxation agreements and the length of time they spend outside the United Kingdom.

I am advised by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security that, where individuals remain ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom while working abroad, they and the United Kingdom companies to which they are contracted are liable to pay class 1 national insurance contributions for the first 52 weeks of employment in most middle eastern countries. Contributions may be paid voluntarily by the individual after that time.

Israel is the only middle eastern country with which the United Kingdom has a social security convention. Under the terms of that convention, class 1 contributions may be due for the first five years of employment there. Liability would arise under Israeli national insurance law if the employment lasted for longer than five years.

Inland Revenue Solicitor

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future structure of the offices of the Solicitor of Inland Revenue and the Solicitor of Inland Revenue (Scotland).

Mr. Dorrell: The offices of the Solicitor of Inland Revenue and of the Solicitor of Inland Revenue (Scotland) were two of the executive offices of the Inland Revenue established in April 1992 as part of the Inland Revenue's response to the next steps programme, *Official Report*, 6 March 1992, columns *319-21*. These offices have been merged for management purposes to form a single executive office under the overall management of the Solicitor of Inland Revenue. However, the post of Solicitor (Scotland) continues to exist within the new office and the holder of the post continues to act as solicitor to the Board of Inland Revenue in Scotland. A framework document for the new office will be placed in the House Library shortly.

Petrol Tax

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what is the estimated amount of revenue that will be raised by *(a)* petroleum revenue tax and *(b)* petroleum excise duty in 1993-94.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* Forecast revenues in 1993-94 from petroleum revenue tax are £0·6 billion and from excise duties applied to leaded and unleaded petrol are £9·6 billion.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Drama Funding

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will publish a geographical breakdown of funding for drama provided by the Scottish Arts Council; and if such funding decisions rest with members of the drama committee or the paid officers of the Scottish Arts Council.

Mr. Brooke: The geographical breakdown of funding for drama by the Scottish Arts Council is set out in the table. Decisions on revenue funding for drama clients are taken by the council in the light of recommendations by the drama committee. Decisions on funding projects and schemes are taken by the drama committee.

Drama[1]	£
Borders	
Jane Houston Green	200
Central	
Federation of Scottish Theatre Ltd.	18,000
MacRobert Arts Centre	1,900
	19,900
Edinburgh	
Benchtours	3,500
Communicado Theatre Company	156,873
Celtech Events	1,000
Edinburgh Puppet and Animation Festival	3,000
Edinburgh Puppet Company	9,000
Edinburgh Touring Circuit	3,000
Fifth Estate	34,000
Grassmarket Project	1,500
Hullaballoo Childrens Theatre	30,000
Pat Keysell	1,255
Duncan Low	300
Jo McNamara	3,000
Muirhouse Festival Activities Centre	900
Boilerhouse Theatre Company	13,997
Royal Lyceum Theatre Co. Ltd.	530,271
Streets Ahead Theatre Company	1,500
Scottish International Children's Festival	20,000
The Traverse Theatre (Scotland) Ltd.	323,793
Theatre Scotland	3,000
Theatre Workshop Edinburgh Ltd.	11,500
	1,151,389
Fife	
Byre Theatre of St Andrews Ltd.	129,920
Glasgow	
Annexe Theatre Company	3,000
Birds of Paradise Theatre Company	4,000
Citizens Theatre Ltd.	514,786
Clanjamfrie	7,500
Clyde Unity Theatre	41,000
Fablevision	20,000
Govan Initiative	2,100
Jane Jewel	1,000
Flloyd Kennedy	200
Music Theatre Lab.	5,000
Media Theatre Company	3,000
Pen-name Theatre	40,000
Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre	3,000
Jo Smith	300
7:84 Theatre Company Ltd.	175,702
Scottish Youth Theatre Ltd.	21,000
Scottish Drama	2,000
Scottish National Association of Youth Theatre	5,000
Phyllis Steel	200
Ian Turbitt's Puppet Theatre	300
Tron Theatre Ltd.	211,839
Tag Theatre Company	151,334
Visible Fictions	15,000
Woodside Area Arts Project	1,000
Winged Horse Touring Productions	18,000
	1,246,261
Grampian	
Aberdeen Art Gallery/City of Aberdeen	11,000
Banff & Buchan District Council	1,500
Crathes 1992	1,500
The Invisible Bouncers	6,000
North East of Scotland Touring Arts Co-Ordinating Association	5,000
	25,000
Highland	
Eden Court Theatre	1,000
Grey Coast Theatre Company	22,000

Drama[1]	£
National Gaelic Arts Project	18,000
Clown Jewels	22,000
Ross & Cromarty District Council	1,000
	64,000
Lothian	
East Lothian District Council	57,541
Strathclyde	
Black Box Puppet Theatre Trust	14,628
Borderline Theatre Company Ltd.	160,476
MacMyth Project	3,000
Cumbernauld Theatre Trust Ltd.	36,500
Edward Jackson	500
Wildcat Stage Productions Ltd.	190,021
	405,125
Tayside	
Dundee Repertory Theatre Ltd.	266,486
Tayside Regional Council	650
Pitlochry Festival Soc. Ltd.	227,193
Perth Repertory Theatre Ltd.	266,987
	761,316
Island Authorities	
Alan Watters	3,000
Others	
Assitej G. B.	500
Half Moon Young Peoples Theatre	3,000
International Workshop Festival	2,500
Medieval Players Company Ltd.	4,000
Northern Stage Company	1,000
Oily Carte Theatre Company	2,000
Ra Ra Zoo	2,000
	15,000
Total	3,878,652

[1] All companies are listed within their home region. Many spend a large proportion of their time touring outside that area.

Marble Hill Park

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what legal obligations and other responsibilities passed on the transfer of ownership of Marble Hill park and house from the Greater London council to English Heritage in respect of the maintenance of Marble Hill park as a public open space and public amenity park including the provision of sports and children's facilities and public access to Marble Hill house.

Mr. Brooke: No specific legal obligations were transferred upon the abolition of the Greater London council under the terms of the Local Government Act 1985, although English Heritage accepted a responsibility as a public body to manage and maintain Marble Hill house and park. Paragraph 13 of the Local Government Reorganisation (Property, etc.) Order 1986 conferred additional powers on English Heritage to enable it to manage the park as a public open space and provide recreational facilities.

Arts Subsidies

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much subsidy from public funds has been provided to the arts in each year since 1987.

Mr. Brooke: Government funding for the arts is channelled mainly through the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Arts Council's grant-in-aid for each year since 1987 is set out in the table.

Year	*£ thousand*
1987-88	139,300
1988-89	152,411
1989-90	155,500
1990-91	175,792
1991-92	[1]194,200
1992-93	221,200
1993-94	225,630

[1] This excludes a special payment of £10·8 million to enable the English National Opera to buy the freehold of the Coliseum.

The Government also fund the business sponsorship incentive scheme, the theatres restoration fund and various research projects. For 1993-94, total central Government expenditure additional to the Arts Council's grant-in-aid will be approximately £5·6 million.

Local authorities also fund activities, but no definitive figures on their overall expenditure are available.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

UN Conference on Environment and Development

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the United Kingdom plans to put to the EC Development Council on 25 May, regarding progress made in following up the commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Development Council will consider progress by the Community since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including what the Community is doing to help developing countries implement agenda 21. As part of this, the Council will consider the findings of a series of expert groups, in which Britain has played an active part. These groups considered priorities in the implementation of agenda 21 in developing countries. Britain chaired the group which considered energy efficiency issues.

Africa (Aid)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the overseas aid budget goes to countries in Africa; and which five countries in Africa receive the highest proportion of that aid.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In 1991-92 45 per cent. of bilateral aid which could be allocated by region went to Africa. The five top recipients were:

	£ million
Zimbabwe	37
Ghana	32
Kenya	29
Zambia	28
Uganda	26

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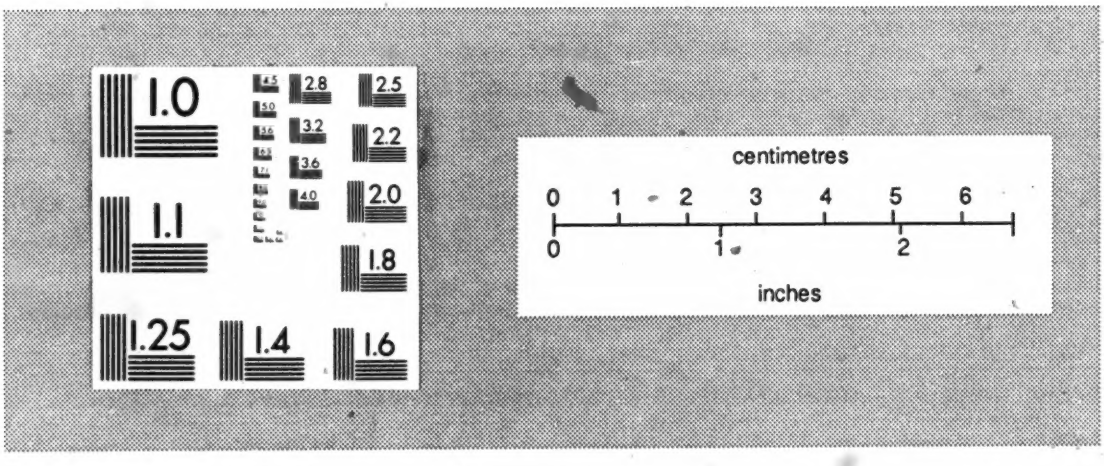

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Overseas Development Administration's most recent assessment of the economic situation in sub-Saharan Africa; what are the economic prospects for Africa over the next 10 years on the basis of current international plans of action; and whether Her Majesty's Government will support the drawing up of a new international plan of action for economic recovery.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The situation of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the poorest, is likely to continue to be difficult and challenging. Where African Governments are implementing economic and political reforms, these are producing positive results which the United Kingdom and the rest of the international community will continue to encourage and support. This support takes the form of substantial concessional aid, debt relief measures and trading arrangements which provide good access for exports from African countries into important markets including the EC; foreign private investment can be increasingly important where African Governments create the right conditions.

A framework for guiding international support is already in place at a regional level, through the global coalition for Africa and the special programme of assistance to sub-Saharan Africa and at country level. These arrangements allow African governments, OECD country Governments and key international agencies to collaborate and to co-ordinate support.

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what parts of Mozambique he regards, for the purpose of providing aid and development assistance, as Government controlled and what parts as RENAMO administered.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No such distinction is made for aid purposes. Aid is provided to meet identified needs wherever it is practicable to do so, taking account of the resources available and access to appraise and monitor use of the aid.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of the channels through which United Kingdom development assistance and food and emergency aid is distributed in Mozambique.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British food and emergency aid is provided primarily through non-governmental organisations, which are best placed to distribute to those most in need. In addition we have contributed to appeals from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Childrens Fund.

Longer-term development aid is provided in the form of balance of payments aid to support Mozambique's economic reform programme channelled through the Government of Mozambique's system for foreign exchange allocation; capital aid for projects mostly channelled through British companies, and technical co-operation which funds British consultants and experts for a range of projects and training programmes.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much *(a)* food and emergency aid and *(b)* health care and medical project assistance the United Kingdom has given to (i) Government-controlled areas in Mozambique and (ii) areas administered by RENAMO, in accordance with the October 1992 general peace accord.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As required by protocol VII of the October 1992 peace accord a donor conference was held in Rome in December. At this conference we pledged £3 million of humanitarian assistance. About £1·7 million of this has already been spent mainly for seeds and tools programmes managed by British non-governmental organisations. None of this commitment has so far been spent on medicines. Since the peace accord we and other donors have succeeded in distributing humanitarian aid much more widely throughout the whole of Mozambique, although some areas remain inaccessible.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the estimated levels of diversion and/or theft of United Kingdom aid in Mozambique; and what representations he has made to, or received from, the Mozambique authorities following Mozambican Government commissions of inquiry into aid diversion and theft in Mozambique.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The only reported losses of British bilateral aid have been pilferage of food aid. We estimate the losses to be less than 1 per cent. of bilateral food aid provided in 1992. All our bilateral food aid last year was provided through British non-governmental organisations, which employ contractors, paid on performance, to store and transport the food to specific destinations. Distribution to beneficiaries is supervised by NGOs.

Distribution of food and other emergency aid is monitored at regular meetings in Maputo, to some of which RENAMO are invited. Our ambassador has taken up cases of pilferage with Ministers in the Government of Mozambique and provincial governors and has received assurances that action is being taken to prevent further instances.

South Africa

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the new South Africa development division will be operational in Pretoria; and if he will publish details of its first year's budget showing the split between higher education projects and other sectors.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The new British development division in southern Africa will open on 7 June and manage our aid programmes in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. We expect the new office to run programmes totalling about £35 million per year. Nearly 40 per cent of this is currently spent on higher education, including postgraduate training awards in a variety of sectors.

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column *260*, if he will list the types of information provided by *(a)* International Planned

Parenthood Federation and *(b)* United Nations Fund for Population Activities to his Department concerning China's population control programme.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: IPPF and UNFPA provide ODA with information about *(a)* China's population policy and programme *(b)* their current programmes of technical and financial assistance to China and *(c)* their planned future activities.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 April, *Official Report*, column *40*, on payments to the IPPF and UNFPA, what sums are planned to be given to these organisations in 1993, or the financial year 1993-94.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 10 May at columns *311-12*.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent on all aspects of overseas aid in each year since 1987.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The figures for gross public expenditure on aid to developing countries are as follows:

Year	*Amount £ million*
1987-88	1,410
1988-89	1,607
1989-90	1,733
1990-91	1,883
1991-92	2,021
We have also provided assistance to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union states as follows:	
1987-88	—
1988-89	—
1989-90	64
1990-91	14
1991-92	119

Full details on these figures are given in tables B1 and C1 of "British Aid Statistics 1987/88—1991/92", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Belize

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help the United Kingdom gives to the Belize Government for rain forest work.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* A five-year forest planning and management project began in May 1992. The total cost to ODA is £3·73 million. In addition, we have been funding since January 1991 a three-year appointment of a tropical forestry action plan co-ordinator; and have supported a number of land use planning activities which have a direct bearing on the management of the Belize rain forest.

EDUCATION

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Boswell: The Department's data protection co-ordinator has no record on any investigation by the Data Protection Registrar of any suspected breach of a Data Protection Act principle.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about his Department since April 1989; and how many of them have been accepted.

Mr. Forth: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the "Sessional Information Digest", copies of which are available in the Library. This lists Select Committee reports and provides reference numbers to Department responses where appropriate.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many children with special educational needs attended *(a)* mainstream state schools, *(b)* special schools, *(c)* mainstream state nursery schools and *(d)* special nursery schools at the latest available date.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is given in the following table.

Pupils with statements of special educational needs attending maintained schools in England—January 1992

	Number of pupils with statements
Nursery schools	298
Primary, middle and secondary schools	71,246
Special schools[1]	79,198

[1] Includes 60 pupils attending special nursery schools.

Youth Service

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals the Government have to provide local authorities with appropriate guidelines to ensure the provision of a wide range of quality youth work; and what priority he considers youth service provision should be for local authorities.

Mr. Boswell: The series of ministerial conferences with the youth service established that the youth service is strongly committed to the principle of local determination. It is primarily for individual local authorities to determine their priorities and the type and mix of youth work provision to meet local needs and circumstances in accordance with sections 41 and 53 of the Education Act 1944.

Pre-school Play Groups

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated financial value of the contribution provided by his Department in England to pre-school play groups in respect of each pupil per session for a year.

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for playgroup matters in England rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The Department for Education makes an annual grant to the Pre-school Playgroups Association for its staff training activities, amounting to £887,000 in 1993-94.

Class Sizes

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what analysis has been carried out by his Department on the impact of class sizes on educational attainment, distinguishing between impact on *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school pupils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department continues to monitor and assess research in this area.

Student Loans

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many student loans were applied for by students in Wales in each year since its inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I will ask the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Testing

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his answer of 10 May, c. *323*, on spending on testing, if he will break down the figure given between *(a)* advertising and *(b)* production of leaflets; how many leaflets were produced; how many parents have to date asked for a copy of the leaflet; how many extra copies of the leaflet have been ordered to date; and at what cost.

Mr. Forth: The cost of advertising the leaflet "How is Your Child Doing at School?" is estimated at £415,000. Three million copies are being produced at an estimated cost of £148,000. A total of 981,000 copies of the leaflet were initially distributed to schools, libraries and LEAs at an estimated cost of £84,000. The number of requests for additional copies is still being compiled. A handout giving details about requesting copies of the leaflet will be available to people claiming child benefit at main post offices during the week beginning 31 May.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Boswell: According to the records available this Department has answered nine parliamentary questions to which substantive answers could not be given on the ground of disproportionate cost since November 1991. This figure represents 0·3 per cent. of the total number of parliamentary questions answered since that date.

Epileptic Students

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what provisions there are for providing teachers with practical advice in dealing with epileptic students; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department does not itself produce advice for dealing with epileptic pupils and students; useful advice is, however, offered in information booklets produced by organisations such as the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, the British Epilepsy Association and the National Society for Epilepsy.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Garage (Car Removal)

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will arrange to have the car J767 CUU removed from the House of Commons garage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce compulsory food labelling for foods containing products of gene technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that all foodstuffs produced involving the use of genetically modified organisms are clearly marked both individually and on their packaging to indicate this fact; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Government's independent Food Advisory Committee issued a consultation paper on 2 April seeking comments from interested parties on the labelling of foods produced from, or using, genetically modified organisms. Copies of the paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

I look forward to receiving the Committee's considered advice which we shall consider with great care.

Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many live animals have been exported from the United Kingdom to each other EC member state since January.

Mr. Soames: Information on trade with other EC member states is not currently available. I shall write to the hon. Member when it is.

IACS Forms

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of eligible agricultural holdings he estimates had not submitted a completed and admissable integrated administration and control system form by 15 May.

Mr. Curry: We have been encouraged by the very high proportion of IACS applications received by 15 May which we were able to accept as having been lodged with the Department within the deadline. We now have to carry out detailed checks to determine eligibility for payment.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

Month	*Wholly disproportionate*	*Partly disproportionate*
November 1991	3	4
December 1991	0	2
January 1992	0	0
February 1992	2	1
March 1992	1	0
April 1992	0	0
May 1992	0	0
June 1992	1	3
July 1992	1	1
August 1992	0	0
September 1992	0	0
October 1992	1	0
November 1992	2	0
December 1992	0	2
January 1993	0	0
February 1993	0	6
March 1993	0	4
April 1993	0	2
TOTAL	11	25

These combined totals represent 1·22 per cent. of the written questions answered between November 1991 and April 1993.

Milk Marketing Board

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the various milk marketing board liabilities which are to be transferred to residuary bodies under the terms of the Agriculture Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Under the Agriculture Bill it would be for each milk marketing board in Great Britain to apply to Ministers after enactment for approval of formal proposals for the transfer and distribution of its property, rights and liabilities. I cannot prejudge what each board might propose or what Ministers would decide.

Granite Imports

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 May, *Official Report*, column *329*, how many of the 50,000 tonnes of granite brought in from Sweden and France as part of the sea defence scheme have not been used and have consequently been removed by lorry, out of Devon, and at what cost; and if he will make a statement as to why British granite was not used.

Mr. Curry: All the granite brought in from Sweden and France was used in the sea defences at Beesands. I understand that, in addition, the contractor brought in by road some 11,000 tonnes of British rock to make up an anticipated shortfall in requirements, but in the event this was not needed for the sea defences and was removed, the immediate cost being borne by the contractor. The National Rivers Authority did not specify the source of rock when inviting tenders, only that most of it should be delivered by sea, so that the choice of British or imported rock was a commercial decision by the contractor.

HEALTH

Health Authority Budgets

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total grant-maintained status budget for each year from 1990-91 to 1994-95 for each family health services authority and regional health authority.

Mr. Sackville: Regional health authorities and family health services authorities do not have grant-maintained status budgets.

Maternity Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list by national health service region the hospitals in England which had consultant obstetric and/or general practitioner maternity beds in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with the numbers of beds of each type in each hospital and each region in each year.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested for 1991-92 will be placed in the Library. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available. Numbers of beds are now collated in terms of directly managed units and national health service trusts. Beds within one unit may be on more than one site or in more than one hospital. The information is set out in three categories: consultant, general practitioner and mixed. The category "mixed" is where bed use can be either for cases referred by consultants or by GPs.

Junior Doctors

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of whole-time equivalent junior hospital doctors and the total wage bill in each of the last five years; and what are the projected figures for the next two years.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 20 April at columns *76-78*, for the available information on the junior doctors wage bill.

The available information on the number of whole-time equivalent junior doctors is shown in the table. The Department does not make detailed forward projections for the number of whole-time equivalent junior doctors.

Hospital medical junior doctors 1987-1991
England—30 September each year whole-time equivalents

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Senior registrar	2,865·5	2,865·4	2,980·3	3,270·8	3,399·4
Registrar	5,664·5	5,888·3	5,822·7	5,871·7	5,944·5
Senior house officer	9,371·7	9,883·5	10,563·3	10,800·9	11,210·7
House officer	2,782·1	2,861·3	2,938·9	3,013·7	3,052·5

HIV

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will consider the preparation and publication of guidelines for a healthy life style for those who are HIV antibody positive but asymptomatic; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Advice on healthy lifestyles for those who are HIV antibody positive but asymptomatic is primarily a matter for individual clinicians to advise on in consultation with their patients. General advice to people who are diagnosed HIV positive, including suggestions on maintaining their health and well-being, is available in various publications, including the Health Education Authority's leaflet "Being Positive—Living with HIV". Copies of this leaflet have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of funds allocated by her Department for HIV and AIDS work in each year since 1987 has been devoted to HIV prevention;

(2) what proportion of funds allocated by her Department for HIV and AIDS work in each year since 1987 has been devoted to support for the voluntary sector.

Mr. Sackville: The table gives details of the proportion of funding from the Department of Health which has been allocated to:

National public education programmes and telephone helpline services through the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority;
Health authorities, since 1989-90, as a contribution towards the additional costs incurred by them in developing community-based local HIV prevention initiatives; and
The voluntary sector.

Percentage

Year	*Public education (DH/HEA/ helplines)*	*Health authorities Local prevention*	*Voluntary sector*
1987-88	29·8	—	3·5
1988-89	13·7	—	1·5
1989-90	8·4	9·8	1·1
1990-91	6·7	13·4	1·2
1991-92	6·9	12·5	1·2
1992-93	5·3	10·0	0·9
1993-94	4·8	9·0	0·8

These proportions have been calculated in relation to the total HIV/AIDS funding made available by the Department of Health to health and local authorities and non-statutory organisations.
Funding for other aspects of HIV prevention, such as infection control procedures, is not separately identifiable within total allocations.
The figures for the voluntary sector do not include any additional funding from health and local authorities. This information is not available centrally.

Maternal Mortality

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contribution the United Kingdom Government have made towards achieving the World Health Organisation target of halving the maternal mortality rates in the world by 2000; and if she will list the actions taken by her Department in furtherance of the Government's commitment to safe motherhood given in September 1989.

Mr. Sackville: The Government support the World Health Organisation's "Health for All" targets, including those for maternal and child health.

Efforts to reduce maternal mortality in England and Wales have met with considerable success during the past 37 years, over which period the rate has fallen from 100 to 5·6 per 100,000 total births. This success is a tribute to the long-standing co-operation between the professionals involved in maternity care.

The Government are determined to build on the established excellence of national health service maternity care. An expert maternity group is currently reviewing policy on NHS maternity care, particularly during childbirth. The group's report, to be published in the summer, will be an important aid in clarifying how and where further improvements can be made. For the past four years, maternity services have featured in the NHS chief executive's annual priorities and planning guidance to health authorities. Authorities have been asked to undertake general reviews of their maternity services and to pay particular attention to specific issues such as improving access to maternity services for certain groups of women, for example, those from black and ethnic minority communities, and to arrangements for consultant cover of labour wards.

Hay Fever

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research she has conducted on the effect of air pollution on the incidence of hay fever; and what action she proposes to take.

Mr. Sackville: None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Government's Advisory Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution has invited two leading research workers, who are currently undertaking studies of the relationship between levels of air pollutants in London and symptoms among hay fever sufferers, to present information to them on this topic. The Department would ask the MRC to consider any research recommendations made by the Committee.

Also, the chairman of COMEAP has been instrumental in establishing a working group on the possible effects of air pollutants upon allergic diseases under the auspices of

the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology. Staff from the Department are participating in the work of this group and will contribute to its report.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent in each health service region on *(a)* printing and publication costs, *(b)* publicity and public relations costs, *(c)* consultation and public meetings and *(d)* other costs connected with the proposed establishment of NHS trusts in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93; and how much is expected to be spent in 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: Tables 1 and 2 show allocations to regional health authorities for 1991-92 and 1992-93 to cover consultation costs and trust start-up costs, including conveyancing. Detailed breakdowns of this expenditure are not available centrally. The Government are making available £2,042,000 for consultation costs and £36,271,000 for start-up and conveyancing costs for 1993-94.

Table 1
Regional allocations for public consultation on trust applications

Region	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Northern	84,000	132,000
Yorkshire	72,000	192,000
Trent	120,000	204,000
East Anglian	36,000	120,000
North West Thames	168,000	120,000
North East Thames	108,000	156,000
South East Thames	120,000	132,000
South West Thames	48,000	84,000
Oxford	96,000	108,000
South Western	108,000	84,000
West Midlands	72,000	192,000
Mersey	96,000	84,000
North Western	72,000	84,000
Wessex	84,000	120,000
Total	1,284,000	1,812,000

Table 2
NHS trusts—Start-up and conveyancing costs

Region	*1991-92* £	*1992-93* £
Northern	1,506,000	2,310,000
Yorkshire	1,506,000	3,234,000
Trent	2,510,000	3,696,000
East Anglian	753,000	2,310,000
North West Thames	3,537,000	2,361,000
North East Thames	2,031,000	2,353,000
South East Thames	2,054,000	2,870,000
South West Thames	753,000	1,629,000
Oxford	1,255,000	2,079,000
South Western	2,259,000	1,180,000
West Midlands	1,506,000	3,370,000
Mersey	2,078,000	1,617,000
North Western	1,506,000	1,155,000
Wessex	1,757,000	2,310,000
Total	25,011,000	32,474,000

Diphtheria

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has about the source of the diphtheria infection at Whitefield school, Nelson.

Mr. Sackville: Health matters in Nelson are the responsibility of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. W. Ashworth, chairman of the health authority, for details.

Blood Donors

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she proposes to take regarding the banning of the use of blood and blood products from paid donors.

Mr. Sackville: This country is self-sufficient in blood obtained from our voluntary, unpaid donors and we do not obtain supplies from other sources. It is our long-standing policy to pursue self-sufficiency in blood products made from voluntary, unpaid donations and seek to maximise the use of those products. We also recognise the clinical freedom of doctors to prescribe other products if considered more appropriate for individual patients.

Research

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been allocated by her Department for research into *(a)* epidemiology, *(b)* aetiology and *(c)* the prevention of cerebral palsy in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: A research project into the epidemiology of cerebral palsy was carried out at the departmentally funded health care research centre between 1989 and 1991. Exact expenditure on the project is unavailable, but the total allocation made by the Department to the centre was £48,090 in 1989-90 and £35,011 in 1990-91.

Departmental allocation for other research into the epidemiology of cerebral palsy in later years were:

Year	£
1990-91	15,200
1991-92	23,917
1992-93	17,083

The Department has allocated no money for research into the aetiology and prevention of cerebral palsy. The main agency through which the Government support research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Department has recently commissioned a research project into the treatment of cerebral palsy at a total cost of £71,335. This project began in December 1992 and will continue until November 1994.

Mental Health Act

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the new Mental Health Act 1983 code of practice will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Yeo: Very shortly.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by her Department

wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Year and Month	*Number of disproportionate cost answers*	*Total number of answers*	*Percentage of Questions receiving disproportionate cost answers*
1991			
November	[1]11	453	2·43
December	0	211	·00
1992			
January	0	357	·00
February	2	335	·60
March	3	190	1·58
April	—	—	—
May	0	195	·00
June	3	498	·60
July	4	403	·99
August	—	—	—
September	—	—	—
October	3	270	1·11
November	3	571	·53
December	1	361	·28
1993			
January	3	420	·71
February	5	571	·88
March	5	624	·80
April	2	338	·59
TOTAL	45	5,797	·78

[1]These questions asked for detailed information on issues relating to back and other injuries to National Health Service staff and were answered together.

Pharmacists

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received on the proposals to amend the pay of pharmacists.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received a number of representations about our proposals for restructuring pharmacists' remuneration. We shall take these into account in the further discussions we shall be having with the pharmacists' representatives.

Tuberculosis Vaccination

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information she has about the provision of BCG vaccination to school children on a routine basis;

(2) if she will list those health authorities which *(a)* provide the BCG vaccination to school children on a routine basis and *(b)* no longer provide that vaccination;

(3) what advice she gives to health authorities which *(a)* no longer routinely offer BCG vaccination to school children and *(b)* continue to routinely offer BCG vaccination to school children.

Mr. Sackville: The advice from the Department of Health is that the schools' BCG programme should continue at least until the academic year 1995-96, pending the results of a survey of the incidence of tuberculosis in this country, which is being conducted by the public health laboratory service. Authorities which have discontinued a school's programme must have in place arrangements for vaccinating clearly defined at-risk groups and for offering the vaccine to any child whose parents request it.

Information on the level of BCG vaccination in schools is not available on a routine basis, but it is estimated that 75 per cent. of the children in this group are vaccinated each year, with a further 5 to 7 per cent. already tuberculin positive who therefore do not require vaccination.

It is understood that a small number of health authorities—less than 10 per cent.—have discontinued the school's BCG programme, but their names are not available centrally.

Overseas Contracts

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy towards British subjects who work on contract in countries outside the EC which have no reciprocal arrangements with the United Kingdom on health care in cases where their salary is administered in Britain by United Kingdom employers and accordingly subject to United Kingdom taxes and national insurance.

Dr. Mawhinney: National health service services are available only within the United Kingdom to people ordinarily resident here. United Kingdom nationals working in non-reciprocal health agreement countries are personally responsible for the costs of health care obtained abroad, but, subject to certain criteria remain eligible for NHS treatment in the United Kingdom. It is the Government's policy to negotiate reciprocal health agreements where it is practicable to do so.

Jeremiah Kearney

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will make a statement on the circumstances leading to the death of Jeremiah Kearney;

(2) whether she intends to review the community care policy and procedures in the light of the death of Jeremiah Kearney.

Mr. Yeo: I have asked the social services inspectorate to examine, with the local authorities, the circumstances of this case, and will write to the hon. Member when the inquiries are complete.

Manic Depression

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is currently being undertaken to identify the cause of, and cures for, manic depression; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The Department of Health is not currently undertaking research into the cause of, and cures for, manic depression.

The main agency through which the Government support research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I understand that it is currently funding several projects looking at manic depression.

Comfrey

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what detailed studies have been undertaken into the toxicity of the alkaloids found in comfrey of which she

is aware; and which were taken into account by the committee on toxicity when compiling its recent report on the toxicity of comfrey;

(2) if she will list those pyrrolizidine alkaloids which were found by the committee on toxicity to be present in comfrey and which gave rise to its recent recommendation that comfrey tablets and capsules should be banned; and if she will indicate, in the case of each of those pyrrolizidine alkaloids, which are known to be toxic at the levels found in these products and which are not.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 19 April at columns 5-6.

Copies of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's analysis of comfrey products, and of the advice of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, which includes the key studies it considered, are available in the Library.

Pharmacies

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to amend the essential small pharmacy scheme; and what estimate has been made of the impact of different options on the numbers of pharmacies which dispense less than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department is discussing changes to improve the essential small pharmacy scheme with the pharmaceutical services negotiating committee. Our proposals will ensure that patients continue to enjoy reasonable access to a local pharmaceutical service.

Public Telephones

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from deaf people about the unsuitability of the new public telephone booths; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

This Department has no record of recent representations along these lines. Condition 33 of BT's licence requires BT take all reasonable steps to install in all public call boxes apparatus enabling people using hearing aids designed for use in conjunction with telephones to do so.

PRIME MINISTER

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister to what investigations his Office has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his office to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

The Prime Minister: My office has not been subject to any such investigations by the Data Protection Registrar.

Defence Work

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Prime Minister what initiatives he is co-ordinating to encourage the allocation of defence work and related employment to the north of England and Scotland.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement on Friday 14 May at column *603*.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

The Prime Minister: The information requested is available in the Library of the House. However, I have answered approximately 1,300 written questions since October 1991, just over 1 per cent. of which were not answered either wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Dedicated Electricity Generation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he published his departmental discussion document on dedicated generation; to whom it has been circulated; and when responses should be returned to his Department.

Mr. Eggar: The Department of Trade and Industry's consultation paper on dedicated and own generation was issued on Tuesday 4 May to holders of electricity licences, the Director General of Electricity Supply, representatives of consumers, the electricity pool and others known to the Department to have an interest in the proposals.

Copies of the paper are available from the Department of Trade and Industry, room 2.3.17a, 1 Palace street, London, SW1E 5HE, on request. Responses have been requested by Friday 28 May.

Trade Mark Reform

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to introduce legislation on trade mark reform as proposed in the White Paper, Cm. 1203.

Mr. Leigh: A Bill to implement the proposals in the White Paper has been fully drafted. Unfortunately, pressure on the legislative programme has been particularly severe. We will introduce legislation as soon as the parliamentary timetable permits.

Leather Goods

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to press the European Commission for an improved system of origin marking for leather goods manufactured in the EC from leather produced outside the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* No. A previous attempt to interest other member states in an EC-wide policy on origin marking attracted little support.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Ms Harman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the overall amount guaranteed under the loan guarantee scheme in each of the last seven years, the

average amount guaranteed, the number of businesses that have taken up the scheme, the number of businesses that have applied for loans under the scheme, the number of businesses that have been refused loans under the scheme and the amount paid out under defaulted loans.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Information on the scheme is held by financial year. The number of businesses which have taken up a loan is not available; some businesses have had two or more loans. The number of businesses which have applied for, and the number that have been refused loans is not available. The number of loans guaranteed, the overall amount guaranteed, the average amount guaranteed and the amount paid out under the defaulted loans for each of the last seven financial years has been:

	Loans guaranteed	*Value £ million*	*Average loan £*	*Default cost £ million*
1986-87	1,042	39·94	38,300	18·5
1987-88	1,222	45·52	37,200	9·5
1988-89	2,266	63·61	28,100	8·9
1989-90	3,204	99·40	31,000	10·1
1990-91	3,387	84·56	25,000	21·7
1991-92	2,933	69·48	23,700	31·6
1992-93	2,342	52·35	22,350	22·4

Unleaded Petrol

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of petrol sold in the years 1990, 1991 and 1992 was unleaded.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* The proportion of petrol sold in the years 1990, 1991 and 1992 that was unleaded was 34 per cent., 41 per cent. and 47 per cent. respectively. In the first quarter of 1993 the proportion of unleaded sales reached 51 per cent.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to publish his review of the assisted areas map; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* I refer to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 6 May, *Official Report*, column *206*.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Beds

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of acute beds each year since 1988-89, in each specialty in each major general hospital.

Mr. Stewart: I shall write to the hon. Member direct with this information and place a copy in the House of Commons Library.

Free Prescriptions and Dental Treatment

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of people between the ages of 16 and retirement age, receive *(a)* free prescriptions and *(b)* free dental treatment.

Mr. Stewart: An estimated 22 per cent. of the population between the age of 16 and state pension age are eligible for free prescriptions and 23 per cent. are eligible for free dental treatment. An estimated further 2 per cent. are entitled to some help with their dental charges.

All young people under 18 receive free dental treatment.

Health Service Staff

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of *(a)* community psychiatric nurses, *(b)* district nurses and *(c)* health visitors in training each year since 1988-89, in each health board.

Mr. Stewart: Information relating to community psychiatric nurses in training cannot be identified from data held centrally. The information requested regarding health visitors and district nurses is shown in the table.

NHS district nurses and health visitors in training: by health board, as at 30 September

	1988		*1989*		*1990*		*1991*		*1992*	
	District nurses	*Health visitors*	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*	*District nurses*	*Health visitors*
Argyll and Clyde	1·0	—	6·0	9·0	2·0	18·0	6·0	11·0	—	—
Ayrshire and Arran	10·0	9·0	6·8	7·0	5·0	5·3	1·0	—	2·0	3·0
Borders	—	1·0	4·0	1·0	5·0	—	4·0	—	1·0	—
Dumfries and Galloway	2·0	3·0	1·0	2·0	2·0	1·0	2·0	1·0	1·0	2·0
Fife	3·0	5·0	1·0	5·0	5·0	4·0	3·0	4·0	—	1·0
Forth Valley	3·8	3·0	2·0	3·0	1·0	2·0	—	2·0	—	—
Grampian	19·0	23·0	20·0	18·0	22·0	15·0	7·0	8·0	3·5	1·0
Greater Glasgow	31·7	26·0	25·0	21·0	13·0	12·0	1·0	3·0	—	—
Highland	5·0	4·0	4·0	3·0	5·0	2·0	6·0	—	5·0	—
Lanarkshire	10·0	11·0	5·0	12·0	2·0	2·0	1·0	1·0	3·0	3·0
Lothian	23·5	20·0	19·0	14·3	12·0	15·0	14·0	13·0	7·0	3·0
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	1·0	—	1·0	1·0	2·0	2·0	—	—	—	—
Tayside	8·0	10·0	5·0	6·0	11·0	8·0	4·0	6·0	7·0	6·0
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	118·0	115·0	99·8	102·3	87·0	86·3	49·0	49·0	29·5	19·0

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of nurses in training each year from 1988-89 to 1992-93.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is shown in the table.

Nurses in training as at 30 September

Year	[1] Number	[2] P2000
1988	10,801	—
1989	10,912	—
1990	10,524	—
1991	9,989	—
1992	7,979	1,403

[1] Includes basic students and pupils, plus nurses on post-basic training courses.
[2] Project 2000.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of health care assistants employed by each health board in each year since 1988-89.

Mr. Stewart: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the salaries of the unit managers who were appointed to the position of chief executive of NHS trusts, for the year 1992-93; what are their current salaries in their new capacity of chief executive; and if he will outline any changes in their conditions of service resulting from their new posts.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Sub-post Offices

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment has been made of the effect on sub-post offices in Scotland of the proposal to remove social security payments from their remit.

Mr. Stewart: No proposals to remove social security payments from the remit of sub-post offices have been made.

Playgroups

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial assistance is available from his Department for voluntary playgroups to meet the requirements of the Children Act 1989 and other legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Financial assistance has not been made available to local groups for this purpose. Many groups in eligible areas, however, receive assistance for their general activities under the urban programme. The Scottish Pre-School Play Association also receives grants under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 to provide member groups with support, advice and training.

The provisions of the Children Act 1989 which govern day care, including playgroups, came into force on 14 October 1991. They were widely welcomed as a means of raising standards and improving the quality of the care provided for young children.

Paintball

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to bring the law in Scotland into line with the law in England and Wales in so far as it relates to paintball markers and the sport of paintball.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend is currently considering what action might be appropriate in the light of the recent Appeal Court judgment that certain types of paintball guns are specially dangerous weapons as defined by the Firearms Act 1968, as amended. Responsibility for amending firearms legislation is primarily a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Elderly Patients, Haddington

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the provision of additional hospital accommodation for the continuing care of elderly patients in Haddington to replace the receiving ward at East Fortune hospital.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* It will be for the East and Midlothian Unit NHS trust, if its application for trust status is approved, to take forward plans for the replacement of East Fortune hospital, in discussion with purchasing health boards.

Assessment of the need for national health service accommodation for the continuing care of the elderly in East Lothian is a matter for Lothian health board. The provision of such accommodation is a matter for the board as purchaser and, if its application for trust status is approved, the East and Midlothian NHS trust.

Hospital Consultants

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many consultants are engaged in obstetrics and gynaecology in Scotland; and how many of these are women.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* There were 128 consultants in obstetrics and gynaecology in post in Scotland, of whom 14 were women, at 30 September 1992, the latest date for which information is available centrally.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the length of the delays which have occurred in respect of the completion of the caissons for the Skye bridge; if he will explain the reasons for the delays and the degree of slippage in the original timetable as a result, with specific reference to weather and geological considerations; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 May 1993]:* There has been a delay of approximately five months in placing both caissons on to the seabed from the original programme. This very difficult operation involves marine works in deep water and is highly dependent on the occurrence of suitable weather and tidal conditions. Delays due to inappropriate weather and tidal condition have also been exacerbated by the longer time being taken to prepare the seabed excavations in very hard rock. Both the design and geotechnical teams involved are ensuring that all due appropriate care is taken in this important phase of the work. By reacting appropriately to these difficult circumstances the contractor is confident that the completion date of mid-1995 will be unaffected.

House Building, Dundee

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to receive and adjudicate upon the public inquiry report on the proposal to build houses in Kellas village in the city of Dundee district.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 13 May 1993]:* The public inquiry to which the hon. Member refers was convened on 23 March 1993 to take evidence from objectors in relation to the City of Dundee district council's rural area local plan. Objections to the proposals for housing development within Kellas village were heard in relation to the local plan. The reporter appointed to conduct the inquiry will report direct to the council. The Secretary of State is therefore not called upon to intervene in this process which is essentially a matter for the local planning authority.

EMPLOYMENT

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications have so far been received by the Health and Safety Executive for permission genetically to modify organisms; and how many centres are currently known to be conducting such work.

Mr. McLoughlin: Three notifications for consent to undertake work involving genetic modification have been received by the Health and Safety Executive and 473 centres are currently known to be conducting such work.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement providing details of those projects for which permission has so far been granted genetically to modify organisms indicating, in each case, whether that work has commenced; and at which centre.

Mr. McLoughlin: No consents have so far been issued.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations are made by the Health and Safety Executive before granting permission for projects involving the genetic modification of organisms.

Mr. McLoughlin: Before issuing a consent, consultation is undertaken with the Health and Safety Commission advisory committee on genetic modification, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of the Environment and, in relation to their territories, the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office. Members of the public have access to information about notifications received and the opportunity to make representations while the application is being considered.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it her policy routinely to report to Parliament details of those projects for which permission is given genetically to modify organisms.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) expect to receive some hundreds of applications for consent under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Contained Use) Regulations 1992 and the detailed information provided with them is copious and technically very complex. However, information about such consents is available from HSE—although the regulations allow some sensitive items to be withheld to protect intellectual property rights. The main elements of that information are held on a public register.

Health and Safety

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what new EC regulations there are concerning health and safety for the workplace; when they will be implemented; what measures she intends to take to ensure that they are fully implemented by all employers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 1 January this year, the United Kingdom introduced the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations, the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations, the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations, the Manual Handling Operations Regulations, and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (Amendment) Regulations to implement the EC framework directive on health and safety at the workplace and a series of associated directives which required implementation action by this date.

There are a further seven adopted EC directives concerning health and safety at the workplace which are awaiting implementation covering biological agents at work, to be implemented by 26 November 1993; provision of safety and/or health signs at work, 24 June 1994; temporary or mobile construction sites, 31 December 1993; indicative limit values, 31 December 1993; improving the safety and health of workers in the extractive industries—boreholes, 3 November 1994, mines and quarries, 3 December 1994; and pregnant workers, 9 October 1994.

In addition, there are five sets of regulations under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 in preparation which will be brought forward to implement EC legislation covering the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances; vocational training for drivers of vehicles carrying dangerous goods by road; and the protection of workers exposed to the risks of ionising radiation.

Employers have a statutory duty to comply with regulations made under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. The regulations which came into force on 1 January 1993 are being enforced by the appropriate authorities in the same way as other health and safety legislation. The Government appreciate that employers need time to assimilate and implement new regulations and that timescales for implementation of EC directives are short. HSE inspectors are concentrating on promoting awareness and providing guidance, particularly where requirements are new or more prescriptive than earlier legislation. They will continue to take enforcement action where significant risks exist.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced a scrutiny into the way EC regulations impact upon business. The scrutiny is due to report on 27 May. We shall study its recommendations with interest.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to amend the current health and safety regulations for the workplace; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department has no immediate plans to amend the current health and safety regulations which apply to the workplace.

The Health and Safety Commission has a remit under section 1(2) of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to seek to rationalise and modernise health and safety legislation, by means including consolidation, and has made substantial progress. In the context of the Government's deregulation initiative, the commission is now conducting a review of all existing health and safety legislation. The review, which should take about 12 months to complete, will consider whether further repeals or simplification are possible without endangering acceptable health and safety standards.

Construction Workers

Dr. Liam Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what policies she has to address problems encountered by British workers obtaining short-term employment on German construction sites.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to this issue. There are agencies, usually based in the Netherlands, which advertise vacancies in the British press for construction workers to take up jobs in Germany. Very often, these jobs turn out to be illegal, breaking German labour leasing and self-employment laws and involving evasion of tax and social security payments. British workers who take up this employment have no protection under German health and safety regulations. They face on-the-spot fines of several hundred pounds and are typically paid less than they have been promised. These conditions often leave people seriously out of pocket, forcing them to seek repatriation through the consulates general.

Officials are entering discussions with the Dutch and German authorities to seek ways of curbing these abuses. Meanwhile, steps are being taken to alert British workers to the dangers involved. There will be warnings in information the jobcentres provide about working in Germany and accompanying the form E101, issued by the Department of Social Security to people seeking to work in Europe but paying tax and insurance at home.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Relations

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the basis on which Government Ministers can visit countries with which the United Kingdom does not maintain diplomatic relations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The existence of diplomatic relations with other countries is not a precondition for ministerial visits to them.

Mrs. Sikandari Jan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be taken on an application from Mrs. Sikandari Jan and her daughter Azra Bibi Khan made to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad, Ref. IMM/B4075, in October 1992 to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The high commission is awaiting confirmation of an offer of employment for Mr. Khan, the sponsor of Mrs. Sikandari Jan. They wrote to his potential employers to request this on 16 November 1992, and have since reminded Mr. Khan of the importance of this information, but have to date received no reply.

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much is scheduled to be contributed by his Department to United Nations peacekeeping operations for the current year; and if he will indicate the level of contribution paid out to date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom contributes 6·373 per cent. on the scale of assessment to the United Nations peacekeeping budgets.

We have paid our 1993 contributions 1 January to 31 March 1993 as follows:

	$
UNEF/UNDOF (Golan Heights)	1,068,752·00
UNIFIL (Lebanon)	4,659,637·00
UNAVEM (Angola)	1,514,184·00
UNIKOM (Iraq/Kuwait)	1,207,777·00
ONUSAL (El Salvador)	720,386·00
UNTAC (Cambodia)	19,499,962·00
UNPROFOR (Ex Yugoslavia)	20,311,627·00
ONUMOZ (Mozambique)	8,822,136·00
Total	57,804,461·00

The total United Kingdom assessed contributions for financial year 1993-94 were estimated at 1 April to be £145 million. Total figures are, however, difficult to predict accurately, as much depends on how operations develop, and exchange rate fluctuations.

Recently approved further appropriations mean additional United Kingdom assessed contributions of $9 million for UNPROFOR, $15 million for UNTAC and $1·3 million for UNIKOM for calendar year 1993. Formal requests for payment are received from the United Nations throughout the calendar year and paid promptly.

We also contribute forces to UNTAC, MINURSO—western Sahara—UNPROFOR, UNIKOM and UNFICYP, Cyprus. Ministry of Defence costs for financial year 1993-94 for these forces were estimated at 1 April at £105 million. These estimates are also subject to revision as operations develop.

Croatia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to invite the Croat President, General Franjo Tudjiman, to pay a state visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no such plans.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We deplore the recent resurgence of fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims in central Bosnia, particularly around Mostar. We also take very seriously the reports of ethnic cleansing of Muslims by Bosnian Croats. The Croatians should have no doubt that these incidents will have a bearing upon the development of relations between Croatia and both the United Kingdom and the European Community.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether evidence is being collected by the EC war crimes investigators detailing alleged Croat attrocities against civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The investigation of war crimes is not part of the mandate of the EC monitoring mission in former Yugoslavia. But ECMM members have witnessed the aftermath of atrocities. A United Nations commission of experts was set up to collate, investigate and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law in former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Croatia about Croatian aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The president of the United Nations Security Council issued a statement on 10 May condemning the fighting between the Bosnian Croats and Muslims. The EC presidency, on behalf of the EC and member states, sent a firm message to President Tudjman on 12 May protesting at the renewed fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims in Mostar and at reports of ethnic cleansing carried out by Bosnian Croats. It warned that stronger measures may be considered if the Croatians do not bring these actions to an end.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has reviewed the status of the United Kingdom's diplomatic relations with Croatia following the recent attacks by Croatian forces on civilians in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such review has taken place. But we are watching events closely in central Bosnia and expect President Tudjman to use all his influence to end the latest Bosnian Croat offensive and to prevent further atrocities. Unless this happens, the international community will consider taking stronger measures against Croatia.

China

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to seek an EC boycott of goods manufactured by slave labour in China's prison camps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no plans to seek such a boycott. In the United Kingdom the Foreign Prison-Made Goods Act of 1897 prohibits the direct import of goods made, or wholly produced in any foreign prison, or like establishment. We have repeatedly made clear to the Chinese authorities our concern about the widespread abuses of human rights in China and urged them, and other countries who have not yet done so, to ratify the relevant international instruments covering slavery, forced labour and similar practices.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received about *(a)* the use of intra-uterine devices in China compared with other contraceptives and *(b)* the fining of women refusing or removing IUDs.

Mr. Goodlad: According to official Chinese reports, IUD use represented 41 per cent. of total contraceptive use in 1989.

We are concerned that family planning regulations in some provinces stipulate the imposition of fines if IUDs are removed without prior approval.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the practice of infanticide in China of babies born without state permission.

Mr. Goodlad: None. We are looking into this allegation urgently.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of *(a)* the draft model laws on population control issued by the Chinese central Government and *(b)* the laws made by individual provincial Governments; and what representations he has made.

Mr. Goodlad: We are concerned that some provinces appear to have coercive family planning regulations. We are opposed to the use of any coercion in population programmes and the Chinese Government are fully aware of our views.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received about measures taken against parents by Chinese Government officials where women refuse sterilisation or abortion.

Mr. Goodlad: None. We are looking into this allegation urgently.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the policy of sanctions ais an effective instrument against aggressors in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sanctions have proved an effective instrument of pressure on Serbia. They have contributed to the change of heart by the Serbian leadership which has now indicated its support for the Vance-Owen peace plan.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 820 adopted on 17 April 1993 will further increase pressure on Serbia and Montenegro. We shall continue our active efforts to ensure that the recently introduced measures are enforced rigorously on a world wide basis. In addition we are examining ways of further isolating the Bosnian Serbs from the outside world. These efforts will continue for as long as the Bosnian Serbs reject the path to peace.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Croatian Government in respect of the rounding up and detention of civilians in and around the town of Mostar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The presidency, on behalf of the EC and member states, sent a firm protest to Croatian President Tudjman on 12 May condemning the actions of the Bosnian Croats, particularly in Ahinici and Mostar. It also warns that should Croatia fail to play its part in ending the fighting, this will have a bearing on Croatia's relationship with the EC.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to UNPROFOR and the International Red Cross to investigate the results of the alleged atrocity at Bosanski Brod in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the mass grave was seen by hon. Members on 2 May.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: To protect their impartial status, neither UNPROFOR nor the International Committee for the Red Cross is mandated to investigate alleged atrocities in Bosnia. The investigation of evidence of war crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia is being conducted by the United Nations commission of experts established under United Nations Security Council resolution 780.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the operation of sanctions in the former Yugoslavia; and if the policy will be extended to Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: United Nations Security Council resolution 820 represents a significant toughening of sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro. Efforts continue further to tighten enforcement.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs told the House on 12 May, the EC General Affairs Council discussed the question of sanctions against Croatia on 12 May, but concluded that such action was not justified at this stage.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Administration in respect of the possible role of United States ground forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United States is already playing a considerable role in Bosnia: United States aircraft are helping to enforce the no-fly zone and airdrop relief supplies into eastern Bosnia and United States vessels are taking part in the NATO sanctions flotilla in the Adriatic.

We remain in close touch with the United States Administration over possible policy options and the question of ground forces in Bosnia.

Cambodia

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to prevent human rights violations in Cambodia.

Mr. Goodlad: The United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia is mandated to oversee the human rights situation in the country.

We have encouraged UNTAC in the various steps it has taken to pursue human rights abuses, including the appointment of a special prosecutor. As well as our assessed contributions to UNTAC's costs, we have made a voluntary contribution of £70,000 to its human rights component. In addition, we actively support human rights groups in Cambodia and have organised programmes in the United Kingdom for their representatives to meet British human rights groups and Government officials. We have also paid for the translation and distribution within Cambodia of the two international human rights covenants signed by the supreme national council in April 1992.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure that human rights are protected in Cambodia once UNTAC withdraws.

Mr. Goodlad: We co-sponsored the resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in February requesting the UN Secretary-General to appoint a special representative to co-ordinate the UN's human rights presence in Cambodia after the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia's withdrawal. The former President of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, has since been nominated for this role.

The resolution also mandated the centre for human rights to run a human rights programme in Cambodia after UNTAC has withdrawn.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pressure is being brought to bear on the state of Cambodia to ensure co-operation with UNTAC and with the implementation of UNTAC's proposals.

Mr. Goodlad: The Secretary-General's representative to Cambodia and the signatories to the Paris agreements are in regular contact with the authorities of the state of Cambodia to secure maximum compliance with their obligations under the Paris agreements including those in respect of the electoral process, human rights and the ceasefire.

Northern Cyprus

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now introduce restrictions on trade with northern Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are considering various options to secure the return of Asil Nadir to face trial. The question of imports to the United Kingdom from northern Cyprus is the subject of a case pending before the European Court of Justice.

United Nations

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will currently list all military conflicts between countries and all civil wars in which the United Nations has been involved; and what is the nature of United Nations involvement in each case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations is actively involved in peacekeeping operations in the following geographical areas:

UNOMOZ (United Nations Mission in Mozambique)

Mandate: Verification of the ceasefire, the separation and concentration of forces, their demobilisation and the collection, storage and destruction of weapons; to provide security for vital infrastructure and to provide security for United Nations and other international activities in support of the peace process.

UNAVEM II (United Nations Angola Verification Mission)
Mandate: Originally to monitor the withdrawal of Cuban forces, the maintenance of the ceasefire and the elections. However, the crisis that developed after the election thrust UNAVEM into a central mediating role. The deteriorating security situation has now further limited UNAVEM's ability to facilitate negotiations between the Government and UNITA. UNAVEM's mandate expires at the end of May, and a report by the Secretary General is then due to discuss which direction UNAVEM should take.

UNIKOM (United Nations Kuwait Observer Mission)
Mandate: To monitor the Khor Abdullah (waterway) and a demilitarised zone (extending 10 kms into Iraq and 5 kms into Kuwait), to deter violations of the boundary through its presence in and surveillance of the DMZ, to observe any hostile or potentially hostile action mounted from the territory of one state or the other. Since 5 February 1993, UNIKOM has also had the powers to prevent physically, and if necessary redress, violations of the border or DMZ.

UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia)
Mandate: To ensure the ceasefire is maintained, organising the demobilisation of the factions' armed forces, arranging free and fair elections, creating a neutral political environment for those elections, overseeing human rights observances, repatriating refugees and relocating those displaced by war within Cambodia.

ONUSAL (United Nations Mission in El Salvador)
Mandate: Human rights verification. Monitoring the ceasefire and implementing the peace accords (including supervision of the demobilisation of Government and FMLN forces).

UNFICYP (UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus)
Mandate: Originally to prevent a recurrence of fighting, to contribute to the restoration and maintenance of law and order and a return to normal conditions. Since the hostilities in 1974 UNFICYP has taken on additional functions relating to the maintenance of the ceasefire and control of the buffer zone. It also carries out humanitarian functions.

UNOSOM (UN operation in Somalia)
Mandate: To provide a secure environment for relief operations, to undertake disarmament and to maximise protection of aid workers.

MINURSO (UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara)
Mandate: To monitor the ceasefire and confinement of each party's troops to designated locations, to facilitate exchanges of POWS (under the auspices of the ICRC) and to organise and monitor a referendum for the self determination of the people of Western Sahara.

UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in Lebanon)
Mandate: To confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore international peace and security, and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in Southern Lebanon. To prevent the recurrence of fighting and to ensure that its area of operation would not be used for hostile activities of any kind.

UNPROFOR (UN Protection Force in the former Republic of Yugoslavia)
Mandate: Wide ranging, but focusing in particular on
(a) Bosnia—protective support for the delivery of humanitarian aid and
(b) in Croatia—implementation of the Vance plan.

In addition to the above, the UN is also involved in several other countries eg Haiti, South Africa, Syria/Israel, India/Pakistan. In these instances its role is principally as an observer.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is a matter of public record available through the facility of the House Library. During the period 9 November 1991 to 7 May 1993 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, replied to 4,374 questions. A substantive answer was not provided to 23 of these questions wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost.

Mozambique

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Mozambique Government since October 1992, regarding the Government's abuse of human rights prior to the signing of the peace accord.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since October 1992, we have made no representations either to the Government of Mozambique or to RENAMO about human rights abuses. We have encouraged both the Government and RENAMO to proceed with full implementation of the general peace agreement which they signed in October 1992. The agreement includes detailed provisions for the protection of human rights and freedom of political expression.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official contacts and meetings he or his officials have had with RENAMO party officials since the signing of the peace accord in October 1992.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The RENAMO leader met my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey during his visit to London on 22 February 1993 and had talks with officials. Our Ambassador in Maputo has travelled to the RENAMO leader's base in Northern Mozambique several times to impress upon him the need to proceed with the implementation of the general peace agreement of October 1992. We have maintained regular contacts with RENAMO officials when they have been in Maputo.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what United Kingdom development assistance in Mozambique since October 1992 has taken the form of political and democratic training for *(a)* Government organisations and *(b)* RENAMO;

(2) what is his policy with regard to providing assistance for opposition parties prior to elections in Mozambique to establish democratic party structures.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made no direct financial contribution for democratic training for personnel of government organisations, or of FRELIMO, the ruling party. We have, however, assisted opposition parties

preparing for elections by the provision, from diplomatic wing funds, of £18,000 worth of office equipment for RENAMO's office in Mapuo, and small amounts for three other parties—PCN, PPPM and UNAMO.

WALES

Trunk Roads

12. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the planned expenditure by his Department on trunk roads in *(a)* Dyfed and *(b)* Wales in each of the next five years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Central Government provision for trunk roads in Wales in 1993-94 is £194 million. An analysis by county is not available as the programme is subject to changing engineering, statutory and financial considerations.

Provision for future years will be announced in the usual way.

Grant-maintained Schools

13. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools in Wales have become grant-maintained schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Seven, and well over 100 schools have contacted my Department for information about becoming grant-maintained. I am pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend has today decided that Ysgol Derwen in Clwyd shall become the eighth grant-maintained school in Wales from 1 September this year.

Labour Statistics

14. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the number of *(a)* men in employment, full time and part time and *(b)* women in employment, full time and part time in Mid Glamorgan.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1991 census of employment shows that there were 70,100 and 4,800 men in full and part-time employment respectively in Mid Glamorgan. The corresponding figures for females were 41,400 and 35,800 respectively.

Development Policy

16. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet Mr. Millan, the EC Commissioner for Regional Development, to discuss recent development policy in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I met Commissioner Millan on 15 March. I have invited the Commissioner to visit South Wales later this year.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

17. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans the Cardiff Bay development corporation has to employ extra staff in relation to the Cardiff bay barrage project during and after construction.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation has no plans to employ extra staff in relation to the Cardiff bay barrage during its construction stage. It is, however, appointing project management consultants to oversee the construction contract. After construction it is estimated that the operation of the barrage and management of the inland bay will require an additional 18 public sector staff, as set out in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

Local Government Boundaries (Delyn)

18. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to meet representatives of Delyn borough council to discuss proposed local government boundaries.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As soon as a meeting can be arranged.

Regional Policy

19. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the review of EC regional policy and its impact in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have sought and received many representations from our structural funds partners. My officials are consulting fully the local authorities, other bodies and the voluntary sector through the review working groups set up for the purpose.

British Columbia

20. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to further both economic and cultural links with the province of British Columbia.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State is to lead a trade mission to North America from 14 to 28 September. One destination of this mission will be Vancouver, British Columbia. Twenty-five Welsh firms have so far expressed an interest in participating.

Road Building (North-east Wales)

21. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning his plans for further road building in north-east Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Our plans are set out in the 1993 supplement to "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s".

Local Government Boundaries

22. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further representations he has received on his proposal to remove the communities of Coychurch Lower, Ewenny, St. Bride's Major and Wick from the proposed Bridgend unitary authority to the Vale of Glamorgan; how many were in favour; and how many against.

Mr. David Hunt: Since my hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Gentleman on 29 March, I have received a further 63 written representations regarding my decision to incorporate the communities of Coychurch Lower, Ewenny, St. Brides Major and Wick into a Vale of Glamorgan unitary authority. Two have been in favour and 61 against.

Rural Economy

23. **Mr. Jonathan Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance the Government are giving to the development of the rural economy in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Government's policies for developing the rural economy in Wales have gained a new momentum since the launch of the rural initiative in February 1991. A wide range of measures is now in place to help create a self-sustaining market economy and to thereby secure for rual communities the long-term prosperity which is this Government's aim.

I refer my hon. Friend to the Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96, Departmental Report by Welsh Office (Command Paper 2215) for more detailed information.

Local Health Authorities (Capital Projects)

24. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives of local health authorities in Wales to discuss capital projects.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I last met the chairmen of DHAs and FHSAs on 15 April 1993 and discussed a wide range of issues.

RECHAR

25. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the European Commissioner for regional affairs to discuss the progress made on the distribution of RECHAR money within Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I met Commissioner Millan on 15 March to discuss matters relating to structural funds programmes in Wales. The RECHAR programme monitoring committee has identified projects to take up the whole of the resources made available to the South Wales programme area: these will be fully committed by the end of the year to good projects aimed at the economic and social regeneration of the programme area.

Sustainable Development Plan

26. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the preparation of a sustainable development plan for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received a number of representations from Welsh interests concerning the preparation of the United Kingdom's sustainable development plan.

Social Work Courses

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the social work diploma courses available in further and higher education colleges in Wales; how many people qualified from such courses in the last two years; and what information he has on how many of those obtaining qualifications were Welsh speakers.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Outside the University of Wales, information collected from further education student records shows that the following colleges of higher and further education introduced a two-year diploma of social work course in 1992-93:

Students enrolled on first year in 1992-93 (provisional)

Institution	*Numbers*
North East Wales Institute with Gwynedd Technical College	39
Cardiff Institute of Higher Education with Bridgend College	123

The FESR does not record the numbers qualifying or the numbers of Welsh speakers.

The diploma in social work, validated by the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Work, replaces the programmes leading to the certificate in social service and the certification of qualification in social work.

Tourism

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the 10 most popular *(a)* day trip and *(b)* overnight tourist destinations in Wales; and how many people visited each of them in 1991-92.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on tourist destinations is not centrally available in the form requested. Visitors to tourist attractions are published in the "Digest of Welsh Statistics" each year and the 10 most popular attractions recorded in 1991, the latest available, were:

Attraction	*Visitors in 1991 (000's)*
Ocean Beach Amusement Park, Rhyl	600·0
Padarn County Park, Llanberis	450·0
Barry Island Log Flume	430·2
Pembrey Country Park	386·0
James Pringle Weavers, Llanfair PG	385·9
Oakwood Leisure Park, near Narberth	370·0
Penscynor Wildlife Park, Neath	289·0
Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans	287·8
Portmeirion, Penrhyndeudraeth	285·5
Rhyl Suncentre	262·2

Answered 17 May 1993

NHS Suspensions

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS hospital doctors and consultants are currently under suspension pending inquiries and disciplinary action.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not available centrally.

Pharmacists

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many registered pharmacists in Wales currently dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of pharmacists working in community pharmacies in Wales is not held centrally. However, in each month on average, for the last 12 months ending 28 February 1993, there were 124 pharmacies in Wales which dispensed fewer than 2,000 prescriptions.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the proposals to amend the pay of pharmacists.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Up to 13 May, a dozen representations had been received from local pharmaceutical committees, community health councils and individual pharmacists, and 22 from Members of Parliament writing on behalf of local pharmaceutical committees and individual pharmacists.

Epileptic Students

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions there are in Wales for providing teachers with advice and training on dealing with epileptic students; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office has issued no specific advice to teachers on dealing with epileptic students. However, organisations such as the National Society for Epilepsy, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and the British Epilepsy Association have produced booklets and a resource pack of educational material. The Welsh Epilepsy Association is giving consideration to providing information through the medium of Welsh.

A Welsh Office commissioned report by the Wales Council for the Disabled on epilepsy generally was produced in October 1991, which includes reference to the position in schools. The Welsh Office has been involved in seminars run by the Wales Council to consider the findings and implications of that report.

Agri-environment Schemes

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce a multi-annual zonal agri-environment scheme for the whole of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My proposals for the implementation of the agri-environment regulation in Wales have been distributed to over 140 interested bodies or individuals. The responses received to the consultation exercise are now being examined and I shall make an announcement in July.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, column *443*, when he expects the information on receipt of disability living allowance to be available separately for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman when the information becomes available which is likely to be towards the end of 1993.

Local Plans

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of those district councils in Wales that have local plans which have been adopted.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is as follows:

Adopted local plans

Authority	*Local Plan*
Aberconwy BC	Llandudno/Conwy
Arfon BC	Rural Arfon Menai Strait (part)
Blaenau Gwent BC	Tredegar Abertillery Ebbw Vale Brynmawr, Nantyglo and Blaina
Brecknock BC	Hay/Talgarth District (part)[1] Central Powys (part)[1]
Cardiff CC	East Moors South Butetown West Ely/St. Fagans North Butetown Lisvane Radyr/Morganstown Canton/Riverside Adamsdown/Splott Tongwynlais and the Wenallt Grangetown
Colwyn BC	Coastal Colwyn
Cynon valley BC	Hirwaun and District Abernant/Plasdraw Aberaman/Abercwmboi and Cwmbach Cwmdare/Trecynon and Llwydcoed Central Aberdare[1] Aman valley Ynysybwl Abercynon
Delyn BC	Mold
Dinefwr BC	Black Mountain[1]
Dwyfor DC	Porthmadog/Ffestiniog (part)[1] Pwllheli Rural Dwyfor
Islwyn BC	Trinant and Pentwyn
Llanelli BC	Wern Action Area
Lliw valley BC	Southern Lliw valley
Meirionydd DC	Ardudwy[1] Llanelltyd[1] Porthmadog/Ffestiniog (part)[1]
Merthyr Tydfil BC	Nelson and Treharris (part)[1]
Monmouth BC	Abergavenny
Newport BC	South East Newport
Ogwr BC	Ogmore and Garw Greater Bridgend
Port Talbot BC	Upper Afan valley Cwmafan, Bryn, Goytre valley and Rural Margam
Radnor DC	Hay/Talgarth (part)[1] Central Powys (part)[1]
Rhondda BC	Rhondda Tonypandy and Clydach Vale

Authority	Local Plan
Rhymney valley DC	Caerphilly Basin
	Mid Rhymney valley
	Upper Rhymney valley
	Nelson and Treharris (part)[1]
Swansea CC	Swansea
Torfaen BC	South East Pontypool
Vale of Glamorgan BC	Barry
	Barry-Penarth Coastal
	Cowbridge
	East Vale
Wrexham Maelor BC	Wrexham Maelor
Ynys Mon BC	Menai Strait (part)

There is complete coverage by adopted local plans in Rhondda, Swansea and Wrexham Maelor.
In addition there are two subject local plans, for the Special Landscape Area in Clwyd and for Touring Caravans and Tents in Gwynedd[1].
[1] Prepared by, or in cooperation with the relevant County Council.

Economically Inactive People

15. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the latest percentage and actual figures for economically inactive adult males.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1991 census recorded 348,356 aged 16 or over as economically inactive which includes all those retired, permanently sick, students with a job in the week before the census and other inactive. This represents 32.4 per cent. of all males aged 16 or over.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, column *444*, if he will express the figures for residents aged 16 years or over classified as economically inactive in each *(a)* district and *(b)* county in Wales as a percentage of their respective populations.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is given in the following table:

Percentage residents aged 16 and over economically inactive

	Percentage
Alyn and Deeside	37·0
Colwyn	49·5
Delyn	39·8
Glyndwr	42·8
Rhuddlan	49·4
Wrexham Maelor	41·7
CLWYD	42·8
Carmarthen	44·5
Ceredigion	46·2
Dinefwr	48·4
Llanelli	49·9
Preseli Pembrokeshire	43·9
South Pembrokeshire	46·3
DYFED	46·5
Blaenau Gwent	47·9
Islwyn	44·1
Monmouth	40·3
Newport	42·0
Torfaen	43·0
GWENT	43·3
Aberconwy	46·7
Arfon	44·0
Dwyfor	48·2
Meirionnydd	45·7
Ynys Mon-Isle of Anglesey	45·6
GWYNEDD	45·8
Cynon Valley	48·4
Merthyr Tydfil	48·5
Ogwr	44·2
Rhondda	51·0
Rhymney Valley	45·2
Taff-Ely	40·2
MID GLAMORGAN	45·7
Brecknock	43·8
Montgomeryshire	39·9
Radnor	42·5
POWYS	41·8
Cardiff	41·6
Vale of Glamorgan	41·1
SOUTH GLAMORGAN	41·4
Lliw Valley	45·3
Neath	47·3
Port Talbot	49·7
Swansea	46·1
WEST GLAMORGAN	46·7

Source: OPCS Census County Report Series Part 1.

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in Wales currently receive industrial injuries benefit; how many of them are between 50 and 65 years; and what percentage of the total Welsh population receives industrial injury benefit.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* The latest available information on those in receipt of industrial injuries disablement benefit in Wales is given in the following table:

Industrial injuries disablement benefit assessments in Wales[1] at 4 April 1992

	All ages	Aged 50 to 65 years
Males		
Number	16,910	5,550
Percentage of population within the age group	1·2	2·3
Females		
Number	1,720	670
Percentage of population within the age group	0·1	0·3

Sources: 10 per cent. sample of Department of Social Security cases, OPCS 1991 mid-year estimates of population (provisional).
[1] A small number of people may have more than one assessment.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women receive invalidity benefit in Wales; what percentage of those are aged between 50 and 65 years; and what are each of those figures as percentages of the Welsh population.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* The latest available information on those in receipt of invalidity benefit in Wales is given in the following table:

Invalidity benefit beneficiaries in Wales at 30 March 1991

	All ages	*Aged 50 to 65 years*	*50 to 65 years as a percentage of all ages*
Males			
Number	108,400	66,400	61
Percentage of population within the age group	7·7	27·2	[1]
Females			
Number	38,200	18,300	48
Percentage of population within the age group	2·6	7·2	[1]

Source: 1 per cent. sample of claimants, Department of Social Security, OPCS provisional 1991 mid-year estimates of population.
[1] Not applicable.

ENVIRONMENT

Hostels (Planning Permission)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend the change of use regulations to enable planning permission to be required to convert hotels and guest houses to hostels for social security claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: There are no immediate plans to amend the Use Classes Order 1987, although its operation is kept under periodic review. Our general approach towards change of use of land and buildings is to conserve a balance between the need to protect neighbourhoods from loss of amenity and the need for property owners to have reasonable freedom to adapt to changing market conditions.

Residential Letting

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to encourage the letting for residential purposes of vacant premises above high street shops; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Under the Department's flats over shops initiative, £25 million is being made available between 1992-93 and 1994-95 to bring empty space over commercial premises into housing use. The scheme aims to encourage, by demonstration, other private property owners to consider similar action for their own wasted space. The Housing Corporation also makes funds available for such schemes under its approved development programme. The Department has issued some 2,900 flats over shop information packs and has helped to host a joint DOE/Property Managers Association seminar for retrial and commercial institutions. In addition, the Department is part funding the living over the shop project which works with a number of local authorities on renovating and letting vacant flats over shops, as well as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' "Spare Space?" project.

Land Purchases

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 4 May, *Official Report*, column *39*, what proposals he has to ensure that housing associations purchase land at a price fixed by valuation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation has procedural requirements, laid down in its procedure guide, which housing associations have to follow when acquiring land.

Associations whose schemes are approved individually must acquire land at or less than the valuation set by an independent, qualified valuer within the procedures established by the Housing Corporation.

Associations whose development programme is approved on the basis of a cash programme must demonstrate that an independent qualified valuer has verified the basis for the negotiation on which the land purchase has been made. If these associations pay more than that valuation, they have to meet the extra cost from their own resources. The valuations must not be more than six months old at the date of exchange of contracts.

Revocation Orders

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 6 May, *Official Report*, column *174*, he will state the nature of the planning revocation order in 1991 to which he refers.

Mr. Baldry: The order issued in 1991 revoked the planning permission granted by Wealden district council for the erection of a dwelling at Ninfield, East Sussex.

Multiple Occupation Houses

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration is being given to the abolition of licence controls over houses in multiple occupation.

Mr. Baldry: Common lodging houses are the only houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) which are subject to mandatory licensing, under provisions contained in part XII of the Housing Act 1985.

The Department has issued a consultation paper on the repeal of part XII. The comments of those who responded are being considered. No decision has yet been taken as to whether to proceed with the repeal.

Other HMOs may be subject to registration under schemes set up by some local authorities under section 346 of the Housing Act 1985. We are considering whether we should review the need for such registration schemes.

Urban Deprivation

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which contractors were asked to tender for the work devising the indicators of urban deprivation now being prepared by the Centre for Urban Policy Studies; for what reasons CUPS were chosen to carry out the work; whether other academic bodies will be asked to comment on the proposed indicators and the methodology for devising them; whether the final recommendations will be incorporated into standard spending assessment formulae; and whether similar work will be undertaken into rural deprivation.

Mr. Robin Squire: This contract was let by competitive tender. To disclose the names of tenderers would breach commercial confidence. The CUPS tender offered the best value for money in terms of meeting the study's objectives and price. We have invited the local authority associations and voluntary organisations to comment on the indicators

and methodology proposed by CUPS, and copies of the proposals have been sent to others on request. The current review of SSAs will include consideration of a range of social factors relevant to the costs of providing local services. We do not intend formally to incorporate the outcome of the CUPS research in SSA formulae. The Rural Development Commission, funded through the Department of the Environment, has ongoing research into rural disadvantage. It has recently consulted on census and unemployment data for use in assessing economic and social need in rural areas.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Howard: Information for the past 18 months is not readily available in the form requested. However, since the beginning of this Session my Department has answered over 4,600 parliamentary questions, 16, or 0·003 per cent., of which have not been given a substantive answer wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost. The monthly breakdown is as follows:

	Number
November 1992	2
December 1992	2
January 1993	8
February 1993	0
March 1993	2
April 1993	1
May 1993	0
June 1993	1

Liverpool Projects

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total funding from Her Majesty's Government towards the rehabilitation of St. George's hall, Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Her Majesty's Government resources in the form of urban programme funding, from my Department, totals some £4,875,531 since mid-1990.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost of funding from Her Majesty's Government towards the cost of the rehabilitation of London road, Liverpool; what is the approximate date of completion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: A figure for the total contribution by Her Majesty's Government to this area will not be available until the conclusion of the five year Liverpool city challenge programme of which London road is an integral part. To date, grants totalling £3,882,000 have been offered to projects in the area, in addition to which city challenge has allocated £750,000 over five years to the London road development agency. My officials and the city challenge team are involved in ongoing discussions with developers regarding numerous other projects which may attract grant in the future.

Storm Damage, Norfolk

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make payments of grant to local authorities in Norfolk to compensate them for emergency work undertaken as a result of damage caused by the storms on 20 and 21 February.

Mr. Redwood: Yes. In the light of information provided by North Norfolk district council in April 1993, my right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that special financial assistance would be justified in this case. Accordingly, the Secretary of State has decided, with the consent of the Treasury, to establish a scheme of assistance under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 in respect of expenditure relating to damage caused by the severe storms in Norfolk in February 1993. Grant will be paid to reimburse local authorities in Norfolk for 85 per cent. of eligible costs incurred above a threshold.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Witness Protection

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a witness protection scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to introduce a national centrally funded witness protection scheme. Both the Metropolitan police and the Greater Manchester police already run witness protection programmes and will offer guidance and advice to other police forces. Decisions about the provisions of protection for witnesses are operational matters for the police.

Book Acquisition

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will acquire for his Library a book, the title of which has been supplied to him by the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have no plans to do so.

Probation

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to encourage the development of similar schemes to the Mid Glamorgan straight thinking on probation programme in other areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: All probation services are encouraged to provide, and to ensure that the courts which they serve are aware of, a range of effective supervision programmes for offenders sentenced to probation which are directed towards reduction of subsequent offending. The effectiveness of the STOP programme is currently being evaluated. The findings will be taken into account in further guidance that we give and by HM inspectorate of probation in the context of their work in promoting good practice.

Vice Squads

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police authorities maintain vice squads; and, of these, how many have sections specialising in pornography.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Fourteen police forces have police officers who are exclusively deployed to vice-related duties. The remaining forces undertake this work as part of general operational duties. Information on how many forces have sections specialising in pornography is not centrally held.

Sheehy Inquiry

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are for public consultation and debate, following the publication of the Sheehy inquiry into policing in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend is arranging for the report of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards to be circulated to all interested bodies as soon as it is published. He will welcome comments from all those concerned on the report and the recommendations which are made by the inquiry team.

Rugeley Magistrates Court

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prosecutions made before the Rugeley bench result in conviction.

Mr. Jack: At the Rugeley petty sessional division in 1991, 76 per cent of defendants prosecuted for all offences were found guilty by magistrates.

Compensation

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have applied for compensation for miscarriages of justice, under the provisions of the ex-gratia scheme of compensation referred to by a previous Home Secretary in an answer on 29 November 1985, *Official Report*, column *691*, since the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to the present time; how many have received compensation; and what is the aggregate amount of such payments to date;

(2) how many people have applied for compensation under the provisions of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 since its implementation; how many have so far been compensated; and what is the total amount of compensation so far paid;

(3) how many people have applied for compensation for miscarriages of justice under the ex-gratia scheme as outlined in an answer on 29 November 1985, *Official Report*, column *691*, and under the provisions of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, since the implementation of the Act to the present time; how many have been compensated under *(a)* the ex-gratia scheme only, *(b)* under section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 only and *(c)* both; and what amounts of money have been paid to those persons in each of those categories.

Mr. Jack: Persons who applied for compensation for a miscarriage of justice do not normally say whether they are seeking to be compensated under statutory or under ex-gratia arrangements. All applications are, therefore, considered first to see whether they fall within the terms of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and, if not, whether an ex-gratia payment would be appropriate in the light of the criteria outlined in the answer given on 29 November 1985, column *691* by the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd).

Since the introduction of section 133 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 in October 1988, 253 people have applied for the payment of compensation. Of those, 54 have received, or are receiving, compensation under section 133 of the 1988 Act; 16 have received, or are receiving, compensation under the ex-gratia arrangements; and the applications of 39 are still under consideration. No person has received compensation under both section 133 of the 1988 Act and the ex-gratia arrangements.

The total amount of compensation paid between October 1988 and March 1993, was £3,428,000, of which £3,137,000 was paid in respect of awards made under section 133 of the 1988 Act. These figures include interim payments in some cases where the payment of compensation has been agreed, but the full amount of the award has yet to be determined.

Obscene Publications Act

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper which has recently been prepared by C4 division within his Department which deals with questions arising out of the Obscene Publications Act and its enforcement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I do not know to what document the hon. Member may be referring. My Department is currently examining ways in which the enforcement of laws dealing with obscenity may be improved. It is not the practice to publish advice to Ministers.

Emergency Fire Service

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where the vehicles of the emergency fire service are based; how many vehicles are based there; when they were last used operationally; what level of maintenance they are receiving; and what is the average age of such vehicles.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The emergency fire service stockpile is located at Marchington, near Uttoxeter, Staffordshire. It consists of 1,078 Bedford self-propelled pumps—Green Goddesses—103 Austin Gypsies and 38 Land Rovers together with other ancillary equipment. The last major operational use of the stockpile was during the national fire service industrial dispute of 1977-78 although small numbers have been deployed more recently to augment local resources during adverse weather conditions. The vehicles, which are between 30 and 40 years of age, are regularly serviced to ensure that they remain in a fully operational condition.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We do not keep a central record of the number of questions answered either wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost.

If we tried to answer the hon. Member's question it would, therefore, involve an exercise of checking through some 6,000 parliamentary questions. This would in itself entail costs to the taxpayer out of all proportion to the significance of the question.

Children

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list his Department's specific areas of responsibility on children's matters.

Mr. Jack: The Home Office is responsible for:

General policy on young offenders;:

The provision and administration of attendance centres for children and young persons;

The law on child prostitution, child abduction, child pornography and children's evidence in court;

Disclosure policy in relation to people working with children;

Placement, regimes and sentence planning for 15 to 17-year-olds ordered to be detained in young offender institutions or under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act.

In addition, my Department has general responsibilities for the police, immigration and prison services all of which may have a youth dimension.

Emergency Planning Grant

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of the existing emergency planning grant aid from his Department for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 to enable the recipient authorities to discharge fully the duties imposed on them by proposals currently being considered by his Department;

(2) what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of the proposed distribution of his Department's emergency planning grant aid for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 to enable the shortcomings in emergency arrangements outlined in his predecessor's statement of 10 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns 393-96, to be remedied.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that the proposed allocations of grant aid will be sufficient once many of the new obsolete civil defence duties are removed from local authorities by draft Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations to be laid before Parliament.

The Home Office proposals involve a small shift in the balance of resources to metropolitan areas and for grant to be paid to metropolitan districts and boroughs for the first time. These measures are intended to assist metropolitan authorities in overcoming the problems in some areas referred to by the then Home Secretary in his statement of 10 July 1991.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by county council and civil defence authority area the proposed distribution of his Department's civil defence and emergency planning grant aid for each of the three years 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The proposed distribution of grant to each authority in the three years 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 is as follows.

County councils

£'000s

	1993-94	*1994-95*	*1995-96*
Avon	300	224	224
Bedfordshire	220	196	196
Berkshire	419	224	224
Buckinghamshire	367	210	210
Cambridgeshire	358	224	224
Cheshire	419	252	252
Cleveland	211	196	196
Cornwall	300	224	224
Cumbria	350	224	224
Derbyshire	241	266	266
Devon	577	280	280
Dorset	338	252	252
Durham	221	252	252
East Sussex	329	238	238
Essex	446	336	336
Gloucestershire	250	224	224
Hampshire	347	322	322
Hereford and Worcester	255	266	266
Hertfordshire	461	280	280
Humberside	297	266	266
Isle of Wight	262	168	168
Kent	522	336	336
Lancashire	278	336	336
Leicestershire	186	266	266
Lincolnshire	296	238	238
Norfolk	428	238	238
Northamptonshire	243	238	238
Northumbria	239	224	224
North Yorkshire	312	252	252
Nottinghamshire	275	252	252
Oxfordshire	367	210	210
Shropshire	229	224	224
Somerset	306	210	210
Staffordshire	273	266	266
Suffolk	314	238	238
Surrey	369	294	294
Warwickshire	312	210	210
West Sussex	296	238	238
Wiltshire	307	210	210
Clwyd	308	224	224
Dyfed	250	224	224
Gwent	294	210	210
Gwynedd	242	210	210
Mid Glamorgan	257	224	224
Powys	155	182	182
South Glamorgan	175	168	168
West Glamorgan	186	196	196

Metropolitan areas

	1993-94		*1994-95*		*1995-96*	
	FCDA[1]	*Districts*	*FCDA*[1]	*Districts*	*FCDA*[1]	*Districts*
Greater Manchester	441	350	224	350	224	350
London	1,503	1,155	546	1,155	546	1,155
Merseyside	532	175	154	175	154	175
South Yorkshire	442	140	140	140	140	140
Tyne and Wear	402	175	154	175	154	175
West Midlands	403	245	182	245	182	245
West Yorkshire	373	175	154	175	154	175

[1] Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

The date on which the regulations come into force may have an effect on these figures.

An alternative proposal put forward by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities for the allocation of available grant between fire and civil defence authorities is being considered.

Factory Fires

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of major fires in factories there have been in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following table gives the available information on fires in factory buildings attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom.

Fires[1] in factory buildings[2] attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom, 1987-91

Year	Number
1987	6,177
1988	6,471
1989	6,540
1990	6,155
1991	5,480

[1] *Source:* Home Office Fire Statistics, based on reports from local authority fire brigades.

[2] Factories defined according to the Standard Industrial Classification, Divisions 2-4 of the 1980 classification published by HMSO (1979).

Unit Fines

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has given clerks of courts in using discretion on unit fines; what steps he is taking to see that guidance is being followed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Guidance on the assessment of disposable weekly income, which is a judicial function, describing the powers available under the unit fine scheme, was issued to the chairmen of each magistrates court bench and to all clerks to the justices under cover of a Home Office letter dated 31 July 1992. Following a meeting with my right hon. and learned Friend on 4 May, the Magistrates Association issued a bulletin to its members dated the same day encouraging maximum use of existing discretion. It is not for my right hon. and learned Friend to advise magistrates on how they should exercise discretion within the law: that is entirely and properly a matter for the courts.

Car Theft

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cars were reported stolen in England in 1978 and in 1992.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* The information available relates to offences of theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles recorded by the police. There were 301,793 such offences in England in 1978 and 556,315 in 1992.

Rape

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many rapes were reported for the years 1991 and 1992 by males aged *(a)* 14 years, *(b)* 15 years, *(c)* 16 years, *(d)* 17 years and *(e)* 18 years.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* Information held centrally relates to the number of "known offenders" —those found guilty of, or cautioned. Information for 1990 and 1991 is given in the table. 1992 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of males found guilty at all courts or cautioned for offences of rape by age England and Wales 1990-91

Year	Age 14	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	Age 18
1990					
Found guilty	1	17	17	15	25
Cautioned	3	3	2	—	—
Total found guilty or cautioned	4	20	19	15	25
1991					
Found guilty	3	4	10	15	18
Cautioned	2	2	4	2	1
Total found guilty or cautioned	5	6	14	17	19

Television Licences

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted in each year since 1987 for not possessing a television licence.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* Information supplied by the National Television Licence Records Office is given in the table.

Offenders found guilty of television licence fee evasion England and Wales

Financial year	Found guilty
1986-87	164,708
1987-88	150,381
1988-89	162,710
1989-90	160,055
1990-91	168,066
1991-92	192,951
1992-93	210,002

Prison Staff

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* Indian, *(b)* Pakistani, *(c)* Bangladeshi and *(d)* Afro-Caribbean people respectively were prison custody officers and governor grade in March; and what proportion in each case were (i) men and (ii) women.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service. I have asked him to send a reply as quickly as possible.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 7 May 1993:

I am writing to supply the further information promised in Mr. Lloyd's reply of 14 April to your Question about the ethnic background of Prison Service staff.

As our statement of Purpose, Vision, Goals and Values makes clear, equality of opportunity is central to the work of the Prison Service. We are committed to ethnic monitoring as a means of measuring whether our policies are achieving greater equality of opportunity for all staff are having any effect. We need to be able to measure whether all staff have equal access to opportunities for promotion, training and career development and, to do this, we first need to create a comprehensive database of staff ethnic backgrounds. The first stage of this process was a voluntary survey of all staff in the non-industrial grades in directly managed prisons. Initially, our database held records of the ethnic origins of only 43% of staff and now, after the voluntary survey, that figure has risen to 74%. Over the next few months we shall be taking further steps to fill the gaps in our database.

The table below is drawn from the results of that voluntary survey. It sets out the numbers of staff in the unified (prison officer, senior officer and principal officer) and governor grades in directly managed prisons and have recorded their ethnic origin as other than white. The categories shown are those used in the survey.

	Unified grades		*Governor grades*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
Caribbean	67	30	0	0
African	39	9	0	0
Black of other origin	32	2	1	0
Indian	40	2	1	0
Pakistani	12	1	1	0
Bangladeshi	18	0	0	0
East African	9	0	0	0
Chinese	10	2	1	0
Asian of other origin	15	2	0	0
Other ethnic groups	92	5	1	0
Total staff recording their ethnic origin as other than white	334	53	5	0
Total staff in grade	20,568	1,979	903	90

You will see that there are five members of the governor grades who have recorded their ethnic origins as other than white. I am aware that, in response to an earlier Parliamentary Question, you were informed that there were no staff in the governor grades who had recorded their ethnic origins as other than white. This was due to an error on our computer records, which has now been corrected.

In the contracted sector, I understand that at Wolds Prison, there are two prison custody officers from the ethnic minorities; one female prison custody officer who is, according to the categories used in our survey, Asian of other origin and one male prison custody officer who is of another ethnic group.

Lowdham Grange

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current plans for the former young prisoners' establishment at Lowdham Grange; what planning applications have been made; and what timetable he has in mind for disposal of this property.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 17 May 1993:

HMYOI Lowdham Grange

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the Prison Service's plans for the site of the former young offender institution at Lowdham Grange.

As you no doubt know, the establishment is no longer used for prison purposes and we have no plans to again use it as such. The Closure Order giving effect to this decision was laid before the House on 24 November 1992 and came into force on 1 January 1993.

We have, however, appointed an agent to manage the sale of the site and have submitted an application to the local planning authority for several possible uses of it once sold. These include further residential development; a golf course; a gardening centre; provision for caravans; a public house; a rest home; rural crafts; an equestrian centre; shopping; a leisure complex or private school/offices; a village green; public open spaces; a health centre and a sports hall. Highways and environmental impact studies are now to be carried out at the request of the Newark and Sherwood District Council.

There have been several meetings with the District and Parish councils to consider the application and once the outcome of this is known the property will be put on the market. I am afraid it is too soon to say when this will be.

Prison Escort Service

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions prisoners escorted by Group 4 have been late for court; on how many occasions prisoners have been more than one, two or three hours late; and what representations have been received about this matter *(a)* from solicitors and barristers representing the prisoners concerned and *(b)* from others.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 14 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your Parliamentary Question about prisoners escorted by Group 4 being late for court.

In excess of 90 per cent. of prisoners handled by Group 4 in the first four weeks of operation arrived at court on time. This is despite the well-publicised difficulties of the first few days of their operation. In some cases, late delivery was due to difficulties beyond Group 4's control. The prisoner escort monitor will be discussing these cases in greater depth with the contractor over the coming weeks. Detail of how late prisoners arrived is not routinely collected.

Some representations have been received by the prisoner escort monitor from prisoners' legal advisers and others. At some courts the contracted time of delivery is earlier than the usual practice before the contractor began his operation, and thus those who need to see prisoners before their court appearance now have greater opportunity.

Blakenhurst Prison

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the budgeted annual cost per prisoner place at Her Majesty's prison Blakenhurst.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms. Joan Ruddock, dated 14 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the budgeted annual cost per prisoner place at

Her Majesty's Prison Blakenhurst. The annual budgeted cost per prisoner per place in the 1993-94 financial year is £16,000. This gives a weekly budgeted cost per place of £310 (excluding VAT).

Magistrates, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women of an ethnic minority background served as magistrates at courts in the Greater London area as of 1 May; and if he will give a breakdown of the representations at each of the magistrates courts in the Greater London area.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the ethnic origin of all serving magistrates is not currently available. In 1992, 31 appointments—12·5 per cent. of total—were made of members of the ethnic minority community in the inner and outer London commission areas. Of these appointments nine were women and 22 men. In 1991, 28 such appointments were made—14·3 per cent. of the total—of whom 10 were women and 18 men; in 1990, 37 such appointments were made—17·2 per cent. of the total—of whom 12 were women and 25 men.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Department's Annual Report (Sales)

40. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many copies of his Department's most recent annual report have been purchased.

Mr. John M. Taylor: All sales of the report are through HMSO bookshops. To date, 391 copies have been sold. A further 222 copies have been sold as part of complete sets of departmental reports.

Court Lists (Sale)

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to increase income from the sale of magistrates and other court lists.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None. Charges made by magistrates courts to cover the costs of providing court lists for the news media are a matter for local magistrates' courts committees.

Immigration Tribunals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many individuals sought appeals in *(a)* the immigration tribunals and *(b)* the immigration appeals tribunals, in the last year for which figures are available; and what were the results of these appeals.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested was as follows during the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993:

	Appeals	
	(a) Adjudicators	*(b) Immigration[1] Appeal Tribunal*
Received[2]	25,594	1,098
Allowed	4,302	267
Dismissed	22,272	525
Withdrawn	6,660	141

[1] Complete figures are not available for appeals allowed, dismissed and withdrawn. The figures given are estimates based on average returns for June 1992 to January 1993.

[2] The number of appeals received does not equal those allowed, dismissed or withdrawn as the latter categories include appeals that were received before 1 April 1992 and determined during 1992-93.

Court Cases

Mr. Blair: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were outstanding at the Crown court at the end of each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table shows the number of outstanding cases for trial at the end of each year since 1983. The 1992 figure is provisional and liable to revision to take account of any late amendments.

Crown Court: Committals for Trial
Number of Outstanding cases for Trial 1983-1992

	Number
1983	21,755
1984	22,036
1985	23,247
1986	21,619
1987	24,235
1988	25,941
1989	23,815
1990	26,715
1991	29,420
1992	29,186

Mr. Blair: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Crown court cases were *(a)* received, *(b)* finalised, *(c)* tried, *(d)* not proceeded with or *(e)* otherwise disposed of in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table shows the total number of cases received at the Crown court for trial, the total number dealt with and a breakdown of how they were disposed of, during each year since 1983. Figures for 1992 are provisional and liable to change to take account of any late amendments.

Crown Court: Committals for Trial
Receipts and Disposals: 1983-1992

	Receipts	*Disposals*			
		Total	*Guilty pleas*	*Trials*	*Other*[1]
1983	73,524	72,567	41,234	25,744	5,589
1984	75,283	74,777	44,075	25,033	5,669
1985	83,898	82,788	50,099	26,004	6,685
1986	84,244	86,426	50,465	28,216	7,745
1987	98,873	96,177	59,218	28,006	8,973
1988	106,524	104,773	68,389	26,820	9,564
1989	98,668	101,232	64,570	26,830	9,832
1990	103,011	100,005	63,588	26,177	10,240
1991	104,754	101,999	62,591	27,608	11,800
1992	100,994	100,723	58,268	26,449	16,006

[1] ie Bench Warrant issued, No Plea Recorded, Indictment to Lie on File, Found Unfit to Plead, etc.

Mr. Blair: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases heard by *(a)* the magistrates court and *(b)* the Crown court resulted in (i) convictions and (ii) dismissals for the last 10 years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The only available information for magistrates courts is set out in table 1 showing the total number of defendants proceeded against for all offences and where the case was withdrawn or dismissed or resulted in a conviction, for each year 1983 to 1991. Table 2 shows the total numbers of defendants acquitted and convicted following trials in the Crown court for each year since 1983. The 1992 figures are provisional and liable to revision to take account of late amendments.

Table 1
Magistrates' Courts: Trials
Number of defendants proceeded against for all offences[1] where the case was withdrawn[2]/dismissed[3] or resulted in a conviction[4]

Year	Withdrawn/ Dismissed	Convicted
1983	162,395	2,022,646
1984	177,183	1,888,329
1985	193,507	1,828,870
1986	236,921	1,814,719
1987	226,669	1,468,435
1988	240,562	1,464,287
1989	263,372	1,448,913
1990	295,106	1,431,394
1991	347,190	1,424,226

[1] Includes indictable (including either way) and summary (including motoring) offences.
[2] No evidence offered, not proceeded against or charge withdrawn.
[3] After hearing the evidence, the court found the defendant not guilty.
[4] Includes defendants who pleaded guilty.

Table 2
Crown Court: Committals for Trial
Results of trials following a plea of Not Guilty to all counts

	Defendants		
	Total	Acquitted	Convicted
1983	33,397	15,938	17,459
1984	32,290	15,962	16,328
1985	33,096	16,641	17,265
1986	36,058	17,667	18,391
1987	31,305	15,560	15,475
1988	32,049	17,542	14,507
1989	31,344	17,517	13,827
1990	29,993	17,241	12,752
1991	30,533	17,760	12,773
1992	27,784	15,534	12,250

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Incumbents (Church Property)

28. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, in what circumstances the incumbent of a parish who ceases to be a priest in the Church of England may continue to occupy church property.

Mr. Alison: Generally speaking, the freehold of a parsonage and church are vested in the incumbent in right of his office. If he ceased to hold the office, he would cease to have an interest in, or right to occupy, those properties.

Insurance (Central London)

Ms Hoey: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, what plans the Church Commissioners have to assist dioceses and churches in central London with the costs of insurance.

Mr. Alison: The Commissioners' primary responsibility is the financial support of the clergy. With this in mind, they operate concessionary car and home contents insurance schemes jointly with the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office. These schemes provide additional assistance for clergy in inner city parishes. Responsibility for insuring church buildings rests with the parochial church council.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Unemployment Benefit

169. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to raise the disregard level of earnings per day, over which an unemployed person would lose entitlement to benefit.

Mr. Burt: Unemployment benefit is not normally paid for any day on which a person earns more than £2. We have no plans to increase this daily earnings limit.

Mortgage Interest

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the most recent figures available for the payment of mortgage interest on behalf of claimants to his Department.

Mr. Burt: The latest estimate is in the table.

1991

	Number
Number of cases with full mortgage interest included in the assessment	337,000
Number of cases with half mortgage interest included in the assessment	74,000
Total number of cases with mortgage interest included in the assessment	411,000

Source: Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry, May 1991.

Notes:
1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. The estimates for 1992 will be entered in the 1992 Annual Statistical Enquiry which will be published on 24 May 1993, as announced in the CSO news release issued on 30 April 1993. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Agencies (Letters)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column *162*, in how many cases drafts of letters from chief executives of agencies within his responsibility have been amended by the agencies as a result of the drafts being submitted to Ministers before being sent to the Members to whom they are addressed.

Miss Widdecombe: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what dates drafts of the letters from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), dated 4 May, to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), dated 5 May 1993, and to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), dated 4 May, published in the *Official Report*, on 5 May, columns *159-60* and *162-63* were sent to Ministers; and in what respect the letters sent to the right hon. and hon. Members differed from the drafts.

Miss Widdecombe: Drafts of the four letters in question were sent to Ministers for information on 30 April. I understand that on two of the letters the chief executive of the Benefits Agency made some presentational amendments before issue to the right hon. and hon. Members.

Benefits (Sexual Discrimination)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the different instances of discrimination between men and women for social security benefit purposes; and to what extent each instance is necessarily linked to the difference in retirement ages;

(2) what plans he has to change the rules relating to men and women's rights to defer entitlement to a retirement pension so that there is no discrimination between the sexes; and what account he is taking of the decision of the social security appeal tribunal in Birkenhead on 6 April relating to the link between retirement ages and discrimination.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 22 April at cols *239-40*. The different instances of discrimination are as follows:

Benefit	*Issue*	*Women*	*Men*
Unemployment Benefit	Maximum age for receipt	Age 65	Age 70
	Age at which benefit rate changes to retirement pension rate	Age 60	Age 65
Sickness Benefit	Maximum age for receipt	Age 65	Age 70
	Age at which benefit rate changes to retirement pension basis	Age 60	Age 65
Invalidity Benefit	Maximum age of receipt	Age 65	Age 70
	Age at which benefit rate changes to retirement pension rate	Age 60	Age 65
Invalidity Allowance and Invalidity Addition to Retirement Pension	Maximum age for onset of incapacity for acquiring entitlement to lower rate	Below age 55	Below age 60
State Maternity Allowance, Statutory Maternity Pay, Social Fund Payments to meet Maternity Expenses	Conditions of Entitlement	Entitlement where statutory conditions satisfied	No entitlement in respect of paternity
Widows Payment, Widowed Mothers Allowance, Widows Pension	Condition of Entitlement	Entitlement where statutory conditions satisfied	No equivalent entitlement for widowers
Category A Retirement Pension	Minimum age of Entitlement	Age 60	Age 65
	Maximum age until which an individual may defer pension to receive increments	Age 65	Age 70
	Working life for calculation of pension rate	44 years	49 years
Category B Retirement Pension	Conditions of Entitlement	Age 60 and over and (i) Married at 60 to husband who is entitled to Category A Retirement Pension, or (ii) Married after age 60 to husband who is entitled to Category A Retirement pension, or (iii) Widowed after age 60 and late husband satisfied contribution condition for Category A Retirement pension, or (iv) Widowed before aged 60 and entitled to Widow's Pensions in consequence of late husband's death	Aged 65 and over and widowed over 65, late wife was over 60 when she died and satisfied conditions for Category A Retirement Pension
Graduated Retirement Benefit	Minimum age of Entitlement	Age 60	Age 65
	Amount of Graduated Contributions paid to obtain one Graduated Retirement Benefit Unit	£9·00	£7·50

Benefit	*Issue*	*Women*	*Men*
Severe Disablement Allowance[1]	Upper age for establishing entitlement	Age 60	Age 65
	Age at which payment can continue if the normal rules are no longer satisfied	Age 65	Age 70
Invalid Care Allowance[1]	Upper age for establishing entitlement	Age 60	Age 65
	Age at which payment can continue if the normal entitlement rules are no longer satisfied	Age 65	Age 70
Reduced Earnings Allowance (not payable in respect of industrial injuries on and from 1 October 1990)	Transfer to Retirement Allowance, if claimant has given up regular employment	Age 60 (except women 60 and over on 10 April 1989)	Age 65 (except men 65 and over on 10 April 1989)
Income of Unemployment and Sickness Benefit for Child Dependant	Claimant's age for entitlement	Age 60 to 65	Age 65 to 70
Income of Category A Retirement Pension for Adult Dependant	Entitlement for spouse where pensioner residing with spouse on contributing to maintenance of spouse subject to earnings maximum	Increase for husband only if pensioner was entitled to an increase of Unemployment, Sickness or Invalidity Benefit immediately before commencement of Retirement Pension Entitlement	No additional condition for increase for wife
Child Benefit	Priority of Title	Wife or Mother has priority over Husband or Father where it is necessary to decide Priority	
Guardian's Allowance	Priority of Title	Wife has priority over Husband where it is necessary to determine Priority	
Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit	Higher Pensioner Premium dependent upon Entitlement to Invalidity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance	Subject to conditions for Entitlement to these Benefits (see above)	
	Carer Premium dependent upon Entitlement or underlying Entitlement to Invalid Care Allowance	Subject to conditions for Entitlement to Invalid Care Allowance (see above)	
Income Support	Payability between ages 60 and 65 for claimants with no other income	Paid in advance	Paid in arrears
	Disentitlement to students on full-time course of study	Disentitlement ceases at age 60	Disentitlement ceases at age 65

[1] Following the Court of Appeal's decision in Thomas and others the Secretary of State appealed to the House of Lords. A doubt existed as to the Secretary of State's power to suspend benefit. It was conceded that until a final decision was made on the cases, women claimants should be paid Severe Disablement Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance on the same basis as men. The European Court has now ruled on the substantive issues and has remitted the case back to the House of Lords for final determination.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have lost their entitlement to invalidity benefit since the recent change in the guidance from the chief adjudication officer to adjudication officers; and what the figures for entitlement for a comparable period were in each of the last five years.

Mr. Scott: Information is not yet available. Comparisons with earlier periods are not possible.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes there have been in recent months in the guidance from the chief adjudication officer to adjudication officers in relation to procedures for the review of invalidity benefit entitlement; who instigated this change; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I understand that the independent chief adjudication officer has issued guidance this year on the effects of the Social Security Commissioner's decision in

cases CS 27/91 and the effects of the revised incapacity benefit medical control procedures which were introduced by the Department and took full effect from 1 April 1993.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what procedure he adopts to alter the eligibility criteria used for processing applications for the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance; and what system is used to ensure that the criteria are regularly reviewed.

Mr. Scott: The eligibility criteria for the higher rate mobility component of disability living allowance are set out in legislation. Any changes to these criteria are made through the legislative process.

We review the criteria regularly in the light of information obtained from the management information system and representations received from disability organisations and members of the public.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on conditions excluded by the definition of severe mental impairment as a state of arrested development or incomplete physical development of the brain, as used in the processing of applications for the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: We have received no such representations recently.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will alter the eligibility criteria for the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance to include people with a severe mental impairment, other than those who suffer from a state of arrested development or incomplete physical development of the brain from birth.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many Alzheimer's sufferers have applied for the higher rate mobility component of the disability living allowance; and how many have been refused.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the table.

	Number of PQs	*Disproportionate cost replies*	*Percentage*
November 1991	312	14	4
December 1991	255	4	2
January 1992	219	14	6
February 1992	272	12	4
March 1992	211	5	2
April 1992	—	—	—
May 1992	167	1	0·5
June 1992	378	13	3
July 1992	361	11	3
August 1992	—	—	—
September 1992	—	—	—
October 1992	263	7	3
November 1992	326	8	2
December 1992	162	3	2
Janaury 1993	279	14	5
February 1993	209	9	4
March 1993	292	12	4
April 1993	200	7	3
Total	3,906	134	3

Income Support (Under-25s)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much it would cost to provide the rate of income support paid to those aged over 25 years to all those aged over 21 years; and if he will consider doing so.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* It is estimated that this would cost £140 million. This includes housing benefit and council tax benefit costs. We have no plans to change the existing arrangements.

(Modelled at 1993-94 prices and benefit levels using data drawn from the 1989-90-91 Family Expenditure Surveys and the Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry 1991.)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much it would cost to provide the adult, over 25 years of age, rate of income support to all those aged 18 to 24 years who live in independent accommodation away from their parents; and if he will consider doing so.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The estimated cost is £110 million in a full year. We have no plans to change the existing arrangements.

For the purposes of this reply, people living in "independent accommodation" have been defined as those who are classified in the family expenditure survey as *(a)* heads of households and *(b)* not related to the head of household.

Notes:

1. Modelled at 1993-94 prices and benefit levels using data drawn from the 1989-90-91 Family Expenditure Surveys.
2. Cost includes similar increases in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Local Offices, Manchester

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which local government wards in the city of Manchester are covered by the Department of Social Security offices in *(a)* Clarence road, *(b)* Old lane and *(c)* Wilmslow road, Rusholme.

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Gerald Kaufman, dated 14 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational

matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking which local government wards in the city of Manchester are covered by the Department of Social Security offices in *(a)* Clarence Road, *(b)* Old Lane and *(c)* Wilmslow Road, Rusholme.

The information concerning local government wards has been confirmed by the Chief Executive's Department at Manchester City Council. The information requested is appended.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Benefits Agency Office and Ward

Longsight office:
Clarence Road
Levenshulme
Ardwick
Burnage (part)
Longsight (part)
Gorton South (part)

Openshaw office:
Old Lane
Gorton North
Beswick/Clayton
Bradford
Droylsden East
Droylsden West
Gorton South (part)

Rusholme office:
Wilmslow Road
Didsbury
Hulme (part)
Moss Side (part)
Burnage (part)
Old Moat (part)
Rusholme (part)
Longsight (part)
Fallowfield (part)
Withington (part)
Barlow Moor Road (part)

DEFENCE

WEU and NATO

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the United Kingdom's current and planned defence expenditure on *(a)* the United Kingdom armed forces and *(b)* the United Kingdom's contribution to NATO to allow for United Kingdom expenditure on the WEU; and what account is taken of WEU expenditure in framing the United Kingdom's defence budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no such plans. Funding of WEU defence-related activities is taken into account in our annual expenditure plans.

Polaris

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average annual running costs of Polaris have been since it first entered service at 1992-93 prices and what items these costs include.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The average annual running cost of Polaris for 1991-92 and 1992-93 is estimated to be £180,000,000 at 1992-93 prices. This includes the costs of manpower; stores and spares; refits; and the in-service support of warheads, submarines and their weapons systems. The average annual running cost of Polaris since it first entered service could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Aldermaston

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current shortfall in staff at AWE Aldermaston in *(a)* the supervisory and AEC category, *(b)* the specialist category, *(c)* the industrials, craft category and *(d)* the non-industrials category.

Mr. Aitken: Following the contractorisation of the Atomic Weapons Establishment on 1 April 1993 the question of staff numbers and any shortfalls is a matter for the operating contractor, Hunting-BRAE Ltd. However, the latest figures available to us in the categories specified are as follows:

	Numbers
Supervisory and AEC	28
Specialists	100
Craft Industrials	19
Non-Craft Industrials	21

Overall Aldermaston's staffing level is at over 96 per cent. of its nominal complement.

Royal Ordnance plc, Birtley

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for future orders of ammunition from the Royal Ordnance plc, Birtley; and what scope exists for bringing forward the placement of such orders.

Mr. Aitken: Ammunition orders are let after competition wherever possible. Tenders are currently being evaluated for orders for tank ammunition and naval ammunition in which Royal Ordnance, Birtley has an interest. No other major orders which might involve work at Birtley are imminent. There is no scope for bringing forward orders, although as I announced to the House on 20 January, *Official Report*, col. *476*, we intend to place a number of longer-term contracts for ammunition with the aim of helping industry to plan ahead with confidence. The tank ammunition order is an example of this.

Army Bands

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Army units will in future have pipes and drums or bugles and drums; and what is the establishment of pipers, buglers and drummers in each category.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Western European Union and NATO

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the present and future expenditure implications of duplication of facilities and activities of the WEU and NATO.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The development of WEU as a means to strengthen the European pillar of Atlantic alliance will be based on the principle of complementarity between the facilities and activities of NATO and WEU so duplication should be avoided. In this context, WEU's

Petersberg declaration of June 1992 made it clear that WEU would have no permanent forces or headquarters of its own.

Trident

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the average annual running costs of Trident.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The average annual running cost of Trident over its life is expected to be about £190,000,000, at 1992-93 prices. This includes the estimated costs of manpower; stores and spares; refits; and the in-service support of warheads, the submarines and their weapons systems. In addition it includes an allowance for decommissioning and disposal costs, and a share of the Clyde submarine base's operating costs.

Western European Union

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence out of what departmental budgets current United Kingdom contributions to the WEU come; and out of what departmental budgets they will come in future.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: United Kingdom contributions to the WEU are currently funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry contributing to the United Kingdom's share of the WEU's current involvement in space-related activities. These arrangements remain subject to review.

Nuclear Weapon Transport Accidents

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his director of nuclear policy and security received a copy of the recent analysis of Ministry of Defence advice to civil authorities responding to nuclear weapon transport accidents, published by the nuclear free local authorities; and what plans he has to make a response to the report.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The document was received on 10 May 1993. Officials will consider it carefully and respond to it in due course.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether any stocks of genetically modified organisms are currently held by his Department; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether any work by his Department is currently undertaken or is planned for the future which utilises techniques of genetic modification of organisms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, who will write to my hon. Friend.

Letters from Graham Pearson to Mrs. Ann Winterton, dated 17 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him whether any stocks of genetically modified organisms are currently held by his Department: and if he will make a statement (Question 8, Order Paper 12 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. As part of the research programme to counter the threat from biological warfare it is necessary to use genetic methods of modifying organisms. This research work generates small quantities of genetically modified organisms using processes that are both time consuming and costly. It is for this reason that small samples of each genetically manipulated organism are stored in secure conditions that meet the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive so that they can be re-evaluated at a later stage should the need arise. Genetically modified organisms that do not exhibit properties of value to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment research programme are destroyed.

3. In 1986 the then Chemical Defence Establishment was registered as a centre for genetic engineering with the Health and Safety Executive and all work with genetically manipulated organisms at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is carried out under the strict guidelines published by the Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation.

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him whether any work by his Department which is currently undertaken or is planned for the future utilises techniques of genetic manipulation of organisms (Question 13, Order Paper 12 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry our research to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to assess the threat to the United Kingdom Armed Forces from genetically modified organisms.

3. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down uses genetic methods of manipulation in its current research programme and has plans to do so in the future. The purpose of the research is to assess the biological warfare threat from genetically manipulated organisms and to produce effective protective measures including medical contermeasures against their use. The results of this work is usually published in the scientific literature.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on preventing the development, both nationally and internationally, of genetically modified viruses or other agents as weapons of war.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Biological Weapons Act 1974 prohibits the development, production, acquisition and possession of any biological agent or toxin of a type and in a quantity which has no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes. This Act implemented the United Kingdom national obligation to enforce the biological and toxin weapons convention. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1992 introduced controls on the export of specific biological materials and certain human and animal pathogens which could be misused for weapons purposes. Both Acts and the convention apply equally to all microbial or other biological agents whether natural, enhanced or modified.

It is our intention to continue to contribute to international efforts to prevent the development or acquisition of biological and toxin weapons by potential proliferators, specifically, to pursue the strengthening of the implementation of the biological and toxin weapons convention and to build on the existing international controls on the export of dual-use equipment and disease causing micro-organisms.

Book Supply

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the book the title of which has been supplied to him.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy of the book is on order for the stock of Ministry of Defence Headquarters Library.

Abbey Wood Offices

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total anticipated cost of the Abbey Wood office complex at Filton, Bristol; what is the expected occupancy and the expected date of occupation; and how much has been spent so far on the construction of the complex.

Mr. Aitken: The estimated works cost of the new procurement executive headquarters at Abbey Wood, North Bristol, inclusive of site acquisition, construction, fitting out, professional works management and VAT is £255·4 million at 1993-94 prices. Within this sum £35·2 million has been spent to date on site acquisition, management, and preparatory works with a further £1·04 million contractually committed.

The new site is being designed to accommodate some 4,800 procurement executive staff, together with service logistic support experts and other personnel, giving a total site population of 5,500. Occupancy is planned to start in autumn 1995 and complete by autumn 1996.

When completed in 1996, collocation at Abbey Wood will produce running cost savings amounting to some £40 million a year; it is also a key element in our strategy to reduce PE HQ manpower by 25 per cent., yielding further savings of about £35 million a year.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This is a matter of public record.

Asbestos Exposure

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the information available on claims made by members and former members of the armed forces for compensation as a result of asbestos exposure.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: About 50 claims have been received relating to alleged exposure of service personnel to asbestos, dating back to the 1930s.

Bosnia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases there have been of United Kingdom military aircraft breaking the sound barrier over Bosnia-Herzegovina; what is the purpose of such a practice; and what information he has of damage being caused to civilian property.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Nuclear Test Ban

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Her Majesty's Government will now declare a moratorium on testing nuclear warheads with a view in the medium term to a comprehensive test ban treaty on nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is of course no question of our conducting further nuclear tests at Nevada while the current US moratorium remains in force. But the Government believe that progress towards a comprehensive test ban should be made on a negotiated and verifiable basis.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in the negotiation of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

No negotiations for such a treaty are now in progress.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 18 May 1993

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Charters

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the definition of citizen used by his Department for the purposes of conferring benefits through the charter programme.

Mr. Waldegrave: Anyone who uses, or might use, a public service.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Polly Peck

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what is the cost to date to public funds of the investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into Polly Peck.

The Solicitor-General: The cost to date of the investigation into Polly Peck by the Serious Fraud Office is approximately £2·6 million but not including work undertaken by police officers.

TRANSPORT

Trans-Pennine Railway Link

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to make an announcement about the electrification of the trans-Pennine railway link.

Mr. Freeman: A consultant's report has been commissioned by a consortium of local authorities and passenger transport executives in the area. The report is currently under discussion with the Department. We are currently awaiting the consortium's response to a number of detailed questions. It would be for British Rail to bring forward an investment case for this project.

Tanker Routing

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further developments have taken place on tanker routing following the consultations on the United Kingdom proposals submitted to the International Maritime Organisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Following consultations with representatives of the Shetland and Orkney local authorities, local and national fishing interests, United Kingdom shipping interests, international tanker operators and others we have submitted amended proposals to the IMO calling for an extended area to be avoided around the Shetland Islands, new areas to be avoided around the Fair Isle and Orkneys and recommended routes in the Fair Isle channel. In combination these measures should provide a standard of protection broadly equivalent to our original proposals while respecting the traditional rights of fisher men in that area. Proposals are also being submitted in respect of restrictions on laden tanker movements in the Pentland Firth and Isles of Scilly. We are placing copies of our amended proposals in the Library of the House.

Submarines (Safety Scheme)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with representatives of the Clyde fishermen on the operation of the Subfacts scheme; what future discussions he has planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: No ministerial meetings have taken place with representatives of the Clyde fishermen concerning Subfacts, but my noble Friend the Minister for Shipping and Aviation, the Earl of Caithness, is soon to meet with representatives of the fishing industry, to discuss the matter, on a date and venue yet to be agreed.

No decisions will be made on the future nature of the Subfacts scheme until this consultation takes place.

Level Crossings

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the level crossing accidents in 1992 and 1993 to the most recent practicable date, the causes of the accidents and the remedial action where taken.

Mr. Freeman: Details of level crossing accidents and any remedial action are published in HSE's annual report on railway safety, which is now prepared on the basis of financial years. Details for the first quarter of 1992 are available in the latest published report, for 1991-92, which is available in the House Library. Collated details of accidents since March 1992 are not yet available and will be published in the 1992-93 report in due course.

London Underground

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about London Underground's plans for the future of the line between Epping and Ongar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have had two representations about London Underground's plans for the future of the line between Epping and Ongar. The line is the subject of statutory closure procedures under sections 54 and 56 of the Transport Act 1962. Objectors will be able to give their views to the London regional passengers committee, whose report, among other things, will be taken into account by the Secretary of State when making a decision on the closure proposal.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures for the construction costs and interest payments associated with the Birmingham northern relief road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The construction costs of the road are estimated at some £300 million at current prices. The cost of finance is a matter for the concessionaire.

Buses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate as a percentage the number of K registration buses currently in use in Britain.

Mr. Freeman: By the end of March, K registrations comprised 3 per cent. of the bus stock—approximately 4½ per cent. of the stock was under one year old.

Waste Transportation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to promote non-road based methods of waste transportation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The transport of waste is treated no differently from that of other commodities. We encourage the use of rail and water where practicable. Our enhancement of the freight facilities grant scheme and new track charges grant may help to divert some more waste from being moved throughout by road. I am chairing a group that is examining the scope for making more use of the River Thames for both passenger and freight transport. In addition my Department is considering more generally how best to encourage greater use of inland and coastal water transport.

Rail and Bus Fares

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport at what rate *(a)* the retail prices index, and *(b)* the retail prices of rail and bus fares have increased since January 1987; what effect Government policy has had on the level of rail and bus fares; and if he will publish a table showing the corresponding increase in real earnings in the rail and bus industries compared with the increase in earnings of white collar workers in the private sector.

Mr. Freeman: The data requested are shown in the tables. Detailed rail and bus fare levels are a matter for the operators. Ministers are consulted when British Rail fares are revised in view of their role in setting the financial framework within which British Rail operates. Bus deregulation outside London has promoted competition and reduced operating costs, thereby leading to downward pressure on bus fares.

Fare indices and the RPI: United Kingdom, 1987-93
January 1987 = 100

Date	Rail fares[1]	Local bus fares in Great Britain	Retail Prices Index
January 1987	100·0	100·0	100·0
January 1988	107·1	106·4	103·3
January 1989	117·4	112·8	111·0
January 1990	117·4	120·7	119·5
January 1991	140·3	136·8	130·2
January 1992	150·7	145·8	135·6
January 1993	161·6	153·5	137·9

[1] Supplied by the Central Statistical Office. Includes rail fares other than British Rail.

Average earnings,[1] by industry and sector: Great Britain, 1987-92
1992 prices[2] *£ per week at April*

Date	Railways industry	Scheduled road passenger transport and urban railways industry	Private sector non-manual
April 1987	284	260	304
April 1988	293	261	325
April 1989	296	253	331
April 1990	274	264	333
April 1991	301	264	332
April 1992	307	275	338

[1] Full-time employees on adult rates. Derived from the New Earnings Survey published by the Department of Employment.
[2] Constant prices derived using the RPI deflator.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what protection he proposes to give to private passenger train franchise operators from takeovers by companies deemed not suitable for the award franchises.

Mr. Freeman: Our intention is that the franchising director will assess the suitability of bidders to become franchisees. He will include terms in the franchise agreement under which the franchising director's consent will be required to changes in ownership of a franchisee.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what obligations will be placed on the new owner of British Rail's freight and parcels subsidiaries to ensure their continued use of rail transport following privatisation.

Mr. Freeman: Decisions about whether to use rail will be taken by the customers, as now, on the basis of price and quality of service.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with how many parties he is in negotiation for the franchising of rail passenger services.

Mr. Freeman: None. Negotiations on franchises will be conducted by the franchising director when he is appointed. I have had discussions with various parties about our franchising proposals.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many British Rail employees will be transferred to the employment of Railtrack;

(2) which assets currently owned by the British Railways Board he proposes to transfer to Railtrack.

Mr. Freeman: It is too early to say. Railtrack will not be established as a Government-owned company until April 1994.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional resources he intends to make available for the Health and Safety Commission, the Health and Safety Executive and Her Majesty's railway inspectorate for the discharge of their duties arising from the Railways Bill after April 1994.

Mr. Freeman: Agency funds for HSE have been increased by about 60 per cent. in 1993-94 compared with

the previous year, in recognition of HSE's increased railway safety workload, including British Rail privatisation. Funds for 1994-95 will be agreed following this year's public expenditure discussions. We are committed to ensuring that adequate resources are made available.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what issues are covered in Working Paper 30 on a draft code for the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high level radioactive wastes in flasks on board ship, as agreed at the second technical committee meeting of the joint IAEA/IMO/UNEP working group on the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel by sea held in Vienna on 26 to 30 April; and if he will place a copy in the Library;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Working Paper No. 17, dealing with exports of plutonium from the United Kingdom to Japan, submitted to the technical committee meeting of the joint IAEA/IMO working group on the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel by sea held in Vienna on 26 to 30 April.

Mr. Norris: I am placing copies of the working papers in the Library of the House.

Trans-Pennine Rail Service

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect the electrification of trans-Pennine rail services will have on local rail services at Mossley Hill and West Allerton; what discussions he has had with British Rail about the provision of a South Liverpool Parkway station; and what discussions he is holding with BR about the Liverpool to Crewe service and the stopping of trains at West Allerton station.

Mr. Freeman: Any decision to electrify the Trans-Pennine rail service would have an effect on local services. British Rail, in conjunction with the passenger transport executive, would need to give the matter due consideration.

Decisions on the opening of new stations and the timetabling of existing services are for British Rail, and, where appropriate, the local PTE and not something in which Ministers directly intervene.

Motor Rescue Services

Mr. Bates: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy towards restrictions on access to new motorway service areas for motor rescue services including the RAC and AA.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The operators of existing motorway service areas are required under the terms of their leases to permit access at all times to the employees or agents of the AA and the RAC to carry out emergency repairs to members' vehicles. I have decided that this right should be continued under the new regime announced on 6 August last year, and that they should also apply in new motorway service areas. My Department will therefore not agree to provide signs to a new motorway service area unless the operator agrees to permit access to the AA and the RAC. I am considering whether similar rights should be extended to other motor rescue services.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence has been submitted to him of the numbers of jobs in the United Kingdom railway manufacturing and supply industry which would be created by the total route modernisation of British Rail's west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: None. Any estimate of the number of jobs created by modernising the west coast main line would depend in part on assumptions about the precise nature of the work to be done, which has yet to be finalised.

Heathrow (Regional Airlines)

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for the protection of slots for regional airlines at Heathrow.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* I have at present no plans for measures in respect of Heathrow slots for regional air services. I note the operator's announcement that the service from Plymouth and Newquay to Heathrow will continue after Brymon Aviation has become a wholly owned subsidiary of British Airways.

Heavy Lorries

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total number of licensed lorries of 38 tonnes gross vehicle weight for each year from 1985.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The figures for Great Britain are as follows:

Maximum weight (38 tonne gross) vehicles licensed at end of year

	(000)
1985	26·2
1986	32·8
1987	39·7
1988	50·3
1989	57·9
1990	60·1
1991	58·6
1992	61·7

East London River Crossing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make available to hon. Members a copy of the reasoned opinion issued by the European Commission in connection with the complaint under EC directive 85/337 in relation to the east London river crossing and the threat to Oxleas wood in Woolwich.

Mr. Norris: Correspondence between the Commission and member states is regarded as confidential by both parties, and the United Kingdom will continue to respect this convention.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he received the reasoned opinion from the European Commission in connection with the complaint under the European directive 85/337 in relation to the east London river crossing and the threat to Oxleas wood in Woolwich; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The European Commission's reasoned opinion was received on 27 April. We are considering it carefully but remain confident that we will convince the Commission of the merits of our case.

Road Schemes (Grant)

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list, by London borough, and with totals for inner London, outer London and London as a whole, the amount of transport supplementary grant payable for 1993-94 for *(a)* major schemes over £1 million, *(b)* minor road safety schemes, *(c)* other minor schemes and *(d)* other schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant.

Mr. Norris: The information is as follows:

Borough	*Major schemes*	*Local safety schemes*	*Other minor works*	*Structural maintenance of carriageways and bridges*
Inner London				
Brent	0	390	738	898
Camden	0	400	372	3,200
City	0	50	298	1,696
Greenwich	0	200	433	865
Hackney	1,334	244	296	532
Hammersmith	0	500	740	1,420
Haringey	371	300	495	1,958
Islington	0	440	494	1,004
Kensington	974	200	256	298
Lambeth	0	90	495	445
Lewisham	7,162	390	702	250
Newham	5,324	350	799	3,377
Southwark	4,068	390	459	125
Tower Hamlets	0	380	292	7,486
Wandsworth	610	790	562	3,446
Westminster	974	380	381	3,145
TOTAL	20,817	5,494	7,812	30,145
Outer London				
Barking	734	290	375	1,155
Barnet	0	390	590	270
Bexley	4,921	300	233	1,144
Bromley	3,615	280	1,018	627
Croydon	3,500	490	814	1,570
Ealing	1,523	290	1,276	677
Enfield	3,510	370	971	1,505
Harrow	12,310	230	217	747
Havering	0	200	321	737
Hillingdon	10,334	690	1,212	620
Hounslow	4,305	244	494	485
Kingston	856	210	246	988
Merton	1,238	390	906	235
Redbridge	0	350	488	988
Richmond	0	290	251	657
Sutton	577	330	659	790
Waltham Forest	1,167	390	666	515
TOTAL	48,590	5,734	10,737	13,710
GRAND TOTAL	69,407	11,228	18,549	43,855

Note: All figures quoted are in £ thousands and represent gross accepted expenditure for transport supplementary grant support. Grant is paid at 50 per cent. of accepted expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Escorted Prisoners

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement regarding the use of staff not trained as prison custody officers to escort prisoners in the east midlands and Humberside regions; if he will list all cases where such staff have been used; and whether the use of such staff breaks the terms of section H of the tender documents or his Department's contract with Group 4.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tony Blair, dated 15 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your recent Parliamentary Question about the use by Group 4 of staff not trained as prisoner custody officers in the court escort service in the East Midlands and Humberside.

No untrained staff have been used by Group 4 to escort prisoners. All staff escorting prisoners have been prisoner custody officers certificated under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

On certain days during the first two weeks of the contract, Group 4 used persons other than prisoner custody officers to drive vehicles on which prisoners were being escorted by prisoner custody officers. This was in response to an unforeseen level of prisoner movements and was not Group 4's original intention, which was to use PCOs as drivers. At no time did these arrangements break the contract, nor are they different to current practice in some police forces and some parts of the Prison Service where civilians are used as drivers.

Mr. Rajanathan (Gun Licence)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the circumstances under which a gun licence was recently issued to the late Mr. Rajanathan of 58 Horsenden crescent, Greenford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Mr. Rajanathan was granted a shotgun certificate on 3 April. An inquest into the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Rajanathan was opened on 30 April and has been adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Police, Staffordshire

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is in receipt of the submission from Staffordshire county council setting out the Staffordshire police authority's view of the need for the police authority to be accountable through a democratically elected police authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend received a copy of the document referred to on 7 May. A reply will be sent shortly.

Mr. Brian Parsons

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received on behalf of Brian Parsons, Ref. 089, Her Majesty's prison, Kingston; and when he expects to respond.

Mr. Jack: We received a number of representations between March 1991 and January 1993 suggesting that Mr. Parsons had been wrongfully convicted. These have all been the subject of detailed inquiries carried out on behalf of the Home Office by Devon and Cornwall police. However, in the light of the results of those inquiries and all the information available to me, I have not been able to find sufficient grounds to justify referring the case back to the Court of Appeal. Those who made representations to the Home Office have been informed accordingly.

Car Crime

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with *(a)* insurance companies and *(b)* vehicle manufacturers about measures to reduce car crime.

Mr. Jack: Both the insurance industry and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders are represented on my advisory committee on car crime prevention. This committee met in October last year and in March this year. A further meeting is scheduled for later in the summer. One of the central concerns of the committee is the measures that should be taken—by the motor manufacturers and the insurance industry, among others—to reduce the opportunities for car crime.

I have also held separate discussions with senior representatives of the Association of British Insurers to consider what more the insurance industry could do to help combat car crime. The most recent meeting was on 10 May.

In addition, I have attended numerous motoring events around the country, where I have discussed the question of car security with individual motor manufacturers.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to encourage the fitting of immobilisers to cars.

Mr. Jack: The Home Office has for some time been seeking to encourage motor manufacturers to improve vehicle security and, in particular, to fit effective immobilisers which would prevent the unauthorised use of vehicles. I welcome recent progress in this area, and will continue to encourage the fitting of immobilisers as standard equipment.

The police scientific development branch of the Home Office is providing significant support in this area through its work on examining and testing the effectiveness of vehicle immobilisers, in conjunction with the motor manufacturers and the insurance industry, and through its technical input into the emerging British standards on vehicle immobilisers.

It is equally important that the security of vehicles already on the road should be upgraded and encouraging motorists to fit security devices, such as immobilisers, is a central feature of our extensive car crime prevention campaign, which is being continued this year to build on the success achieved in 1992.

Prison Escort Services

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statutory provisions apply to the use of mechanical restraints such as handcuffs by private security firms carrying out prison escort services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 15 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your recent Parliamentary Question about the use of restraints by contractors carrying out prisoner escort duties under the provisions of the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

There are no statutory provisions relating to the use of mechanical restraints by prisoner custody officers.

Section 82(1) of the 1991 Act gives prisoner custody officers (PCOs) powers of search. Section 82(3) gives PCOs duties to prevent the escape of prisoners from lawful custody; to prevent the commission by prisoners of other unlawful acts; to ensure good order and discipline on the part of prisoners; and to give effect to any directions as to their treatment which are given by a court. Section 82(4) gives PCOs on court premises in which the Crown court is sitting the duty to give effect to any order of that court made under Section 34A of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 (power of Crown court to order search of persons before it).

Section 82(5) states that the various powers mentioned above shall include power to use reasonable force where necessary and it follows that force may include, in appropriate circumstances, the use of restraints.

Bosnian Refugees

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are currently being undertaken by his Department to ensure that families of Bosnian refugees are entitled to join refugees who have settled within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Spouses and minor children are admitted to join those recognised as refugees under the terms of the 1951 convention on the status of refugees. In such cases Bosnian family members would need first to obtain visas from a British diplomatic post. Close dependants are also admitted to join former detention camp inmates evacuated to the United Kingdom, and we are in close liaison with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross to facilitate their entry.

In common with all other nationalities, Bosnian asylum applicants may not bring their families here while their applications are under consideration.

Immigration

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigrants and refugees have been admitted into the United Kingdom in each year since 1987.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in the years 1987-91 is given in table 9 of the 1991 volume of the annual Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom" (Cm 2063). Information for 1992 is given in table 3 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue 14/93 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Third and Fourth Quarters and Year 1992". These figures are of persons subject to immigration control who are granted indefinite leave to remain here. Copies of the publications are in the Library.

Information on the number of applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, and on decisions made, in the years 1987-92 is given in the following table. The fall in applications in 1992 followed measures introduced in late 1991 to deter multiple and other fraudulent claims.

Applications[1] received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and decisions[2], 1987 to 1992

Number of principal applicants

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Total applications received	4,256	3,998	11,640	22,000	44,840	24,610
Decisions[2]						
Total decisions	2,432	2,702	6,955	4,015	5,965	34,900
Recognised as refugee and granted asylum[3]	266	628	2,210	900	505	1,115
Not recognised as refugee, but granted exceptional leave[4]	1,531	1,578	3,860	2,400	2,230	15,325
Refusals						
Total refused	635	496	890	710	3,240	18,465
Refused asylum and exceptional leave after full consideration	635	496	890	710	2,185	2,680
Refused on safe third country grounds[5]	—	—	—	—	270	595
Refused under paragraph 101 of Immigration Rules[6]	—	—	—	—	785	15,195

[1] Includes applications made at ports on arrival and those made in-country.
[2] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.
[3] Excluding South East Asian refugees.
[4] Where it would have been unreasonable or impractical to seek to enforce return to country of origin.
[5] Figures from 1 January 1991 only. Prior to this, these refusals are included in the column "Refused asylum and exceptional leave after full consideration".
[6] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period, including failure to respond to two invitations to interview to establish identity.
[7] Figures from 1 December 1991 only. Prior to this, these refusals are included in the column "Refused asylum and exceptional leave after full consideration".

Civil Defence

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he intends to publish the draft Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The regulations were laid before Parliament today.

Pathology Service

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where the Home Office pathologist Dr. John Rutherford is based; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Dr. John Rutherford, MRCPath, DMJ(Path), is a Home Office accredited forensic pathologist based at the North Manchester general hospital, Crumpsall, Manchester.

Victim Support

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the total Home Office budget is spent on victim support; and what actual sums have been allocated for 1992-93 and the current financial year.

Mr. Jack: In 1992-93 Home Office grant aid to the national charity Victim Support amounted to £7·3 million, while provisional outturn expenditure by the Home Office on criminal injuries compensation amounted to £145 million. The Scottish Office contributed a further £21·7

million. In 1993-94 Home Office grant aid to Victim Support will increase by 15 per cent. to £8·4 million, while Home Office vote provision for criminal injuries compensation is £187·9 million.

Home Office vote provision for supporting victims of crime in the current year accordingly amounts to 3·3 per cent. of the total Home Office vote provision of £5·9 billion.

Passport Agency

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation with staff unions occurred prior to the announcement on 28 April that the Passport Agency was to be privatised or market tested.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The trade union side of the Home Office departmental Whitley Council was informed in a letter of 23 April 1993 of plans to review future options for the activities of the United Kingdom Passport Agency, including an examination of the scope for privatisation or market testing, as part of the process leading to a review of the agency's framework document. The trade union side of the Whitley Committee for the Passport Agency were informed of these plans at the same time.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if staff unions will have an opportunity to study either the emerging findings or the scoping report prior to any market-testing exercises at the Passport Agency.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Emerging findings and scoping study reports of any market tests associated with the Passport Agency will be made available to the unions provided they do not bear any security or confidentiality classification.

Employment Protection Regulations

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department intends to take legal advice on the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 *(a)* initially at the point of identification of a business, *(b)* at the conclusion of the scoping study, *(c)* prior to invitations to tender and *(d)* prior to the award of a contract; and what is the estimated cost of such advice.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Home Office legal advisers will be consulted at the outset of a market test to establish whether the regulations are likely to apply. They will be consulted at the scoping study stage if that study has identified any material change which might affect the applicability of the regulations. Legal advisers will be consulted prior to the issue of an invitation to tender, and prior to the award of contract. The time spent on the advice will depend on the complexity of the market test and it is not, therefore, possible to estimate this in advance.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if companies involved in future Home Office market-testing exercises will be required to state their policy on the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and to take into account the consequences of any such application.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Yes. The invitation to tender documents will require companies to indicate whether the regulations would apply to their bids.

Civil Protection Regulations

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he gives to local authorities on the levels of expenditure needed to meet their obligations under the civil protection regulations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The grant allocation proposed by the Home Office to local authorities is intended to be a contribution to the costs involved in meeting their responsibilities under the Civil Defence Regulations. It will be for each authority to decide upon the actual level of expenditure needed to meet all of its obligations.

ENVIRONMENT

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what performance targets he has set for the Queen Elizabeth II conference centre for 1993-94.

Mr. Baldry: The centre's key performance measure is the net balance on its trading account. The target for 1993-94 is a trading deficit of £0·866 million.

The centre also has a projected overall room occupancy target of 49 per cent., a room hire revenue target of £3·584 million and a revenue: cost ratio target of 1:1·17. The centre will be expected to meet or better all of these projections.

Waste-to-Energy Schemes

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the effect of waste-to-energy schemes in reducing demand for landfill waste disposal sites; what assessment his Department has made of the impact on demand for landfill sites of the closure of existing waste incineration plants after 1996; and what plans he has to review existing requirements to dispose of inert ash residues from waste-to-energy plants via landfill.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* The proportion of waste destined for landfill is expected to fall as a result of the Government's waste minimisation and recycling policies and the development of new waste-to-energy schemes. Some municipal waste incinerators will have to close within the next few years because it will not be cost effective for them to be upgraded in order to achieve the requirements of the directive 89/429/EEC. Others are being upgraded and new plants are being constructed. The directive itself is not thought likely to have a significant effect on the proportion of waste disposed of by incineration. At present, my Department has no plans to review the use of landfill as a disposal option for inert incinerator ash—there is no alternative disposal option.

Coastal Zone Management

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what views his Department has expressed to institutions of the European Community on the EC directive on coasts and the community strategy for integrated coastal zone management as highlighted in the fifth environmental action programme.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The Government will take an active part in ensuring that any

proposals which come forward from the Community on coastal zone planning and management are workable and effective.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the presentation by the European Commission of the coastal zone directive to the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* At present, the Commission has not published any directive on the coastal zone.

Waste Management

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *470*, what assessment he has made of the burdens that the proposed new waste management licensing system will place on industry; and what consideration he has given to them in the light of the deregulation exercise.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* In considering proposals for new regulations, the Government place great importance on giving due weight to business' perception of the proposal's likely impact on business. To that end, the Department's consultation papers on waste management licensing issued on 10 August and 18 December contained estimates of certain costs that would arise and an invitation to consultees to provide information on additional costs that the proposals would impose on business. No usable information was provided by consultees. A compliance cost assessment will therefore be produced in due course on the basis of official estimates of additional costs; and industry will be invited to comment specifically on that.

The main consideration relevant to the deregulation exercise is the range and scope of the exemptions from licensing provided in the waste management licensing regulations. We have received a large number of representations on this point and are giving them sympathetic consideration where we can achieve our environmental objectives without licensing.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) *Official Report*, column *470*, on further revisions to the waste management licensing timetable, if he will list those technical problems which have not yet been fully resolved concerning the relationship between waste management licensing and European Community measures dealing with waste; and for what reasons these problems were not identified at the time the EC measures were adopted.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* As well as considering the impact of the EC framework directive on waste (91/156/EEC) on part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, we have had to give further consideration to the effect of the directive on other regulatory regimes which control the handling, keeping, treatment and disposal of waste; particularly where the scope for providing exemptions from the proposed Waste Management Licensing Regulations relies on such regulatory regimes for the implementation of the directive. These are technical problems which affect the detailed drafting of the regulations, and could not have been reasonably foreseen when the directive was adopted. It is regrettable that this has delayed implementation of the waste licensing provisions, but it is essential that the implications of the framework directive are properly reflected in the regulations before they are laid, to ensure both that we meet our EC obligations and that we do not place burdens on industry by unnecessarily exceeding them.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the findings of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's report on the timetable for opening an underground store at Sellafield.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The timetable for establishing a deep disposal facility for low and intermediate level radioactive waste is a matter for Nirex.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to delay any decisions on THORP until the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee has completed its review of radioactive waste disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* A decision about THORP will be taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as soon as the necessary procedures have been completed.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implications of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's report for storage of low and medium-level waste from *(a)* Magnox nuclear reactors and *(b)* the proposed THORP reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Low-level radioactive waste is, and will continue to be, disposed of at British Nuclear Fuels' site at Drigg. Intermediate level radioactive waste will be stored until it can be disposed of in Nirex's deep disposal facility.

Waste Managers

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what preparations are to be made for the introduction of certificates of technical competence for waste managers and associated guidance on assessing technical competence under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: Following the further delay in the introduction of waste management licensing under the Environmental Protection Act which I announced on 29 April at column *4708*, my Department has been discussing the position of the provisions on technical competence with the waste management industry training and advisory board (WAMITAB).

The issues delaying the waste management licensing regulations do not throw any doubt on the provisions

regarding technical competence. I have therefore published today the text of provisions that the Government will bring forward as part of waste management licensing in due course. These provisions would prescribe WAMITAB certificates as evidence of technical competence and include transitional provisions for existing waste managers, and will be embodied in regulations under the 1990 Act to be put before the House as part of the waste management licensing regulations. I have also published an advance extract from the associated statutory guidance on assessing technical competence. I have deposited a copy of this material in the Library of the House.

This advance information will enable waste managers, waste regulators and WAMITAB to make early preparations for this important part of the 1990 Act.

My Department has now let a contract with WAMITAB under which it will complete its system for awarding certificates of technical competence based on national vocational qualifications.

The certificates of technical competence to be offered by WAMITAB will be an important component of the improved environmental standards in waste management to be achieved by the waste regulation provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, and the Government fully endorse the work of the board.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UN Funds

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the United Nations to secure non-governmental organisation representation on *(a)* the United Nations development programme and *(b)* on the executive council of the United Nation's children's fund.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: International non-governmental organisations can gain observer status on the governing bodies of both the UN development programme and the UN children's fund through the existing arrangements for accreditation of NGOs to the UN Economic and Social Council. We are playing an active role in moves to obtain easier access for NGOs to UN bodies following the success of the wider involvement of NGOs at the Rio summit last year.

Landmines Protocol

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government intend to ratify the 1981 landmines protocol; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The situation remains as set out in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 9 March at column *517*.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what investigations the diplomatic and aid wings of his Department have been subject by the Data Protection Register in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: There has been one complaint, in 1989, to the Data Protection Registrar in respect of the diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The registrar found against the complainant, who was requesting access to paper files outwith the act. There has been no complaint in respect of the aid wing of the FCO.

East Timor

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many representations he has received on the subject of East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We have received numerous representations on the subject of East Timor. We welcome the resumption, under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General, of the Indonesian-Portuguese dialogue on East Timor and have encouraged both sides to be as constructive as possible. We maintain a regular dialogue on human rights with the Indonesian authorities, bilaterally and together with our EC partners. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised our concerns most recently when he visited Indonesia in early April.

Western European Union (Greece)

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union the future of the union in the light of the application by Greece for membership.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The next WEU Council of Ministers in Rome on 19-20 May will discuss inter alia enlargement and the future role of the WEU. Enlargement, including Greek accession, Turkey, Iceland and Norway becoming associate members and Denmark and Ireland observers, will enable the WEU better to develop its role. Greece, as a future member state, and the future associates and observers will participate in the Rome ministerial meeting.

Gibraltar

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what ultimate responsibility is held by Her Majesty's Government for debts incurred by the Government of Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Under the constitution the Governor has responsibility to maintain the financial and economic stability of the territory. But it is the responsibility of the Government of Gibraltar to service its own debts.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Africa

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the Overseas Development Administration's budget will be spent on aid and assistance to Africa, and to each other continent, in the current financial year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Of the ODA's external assistance vote, as approved in the main supply estimates 1993-94, 36 per cent. is provided, within bilateral programmes, specifically for country programmes, including the aid and trade provision and bilateral assistance to central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

This proportion can be broken down by continent as follows:

	Per cent.
Africa	44
America	8
Asia	39
Europe (including former Soviet Union)	8
Oceania	1

British Dependencies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the proportion of overseas aid allocated to each of the British overseas dependencies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The proportions of gross bilateral aid allocated to British dependencies in 1991-92 were as follows:

Dependency	*Per cent.*
Anguilla	0·2
Bermuda	[1]—
British Virgin Islands	0·2
Cayman Islands	0·2
Falkland Islands	0·1
Gibraltar	0·1
Hong Kong	[1]—
Montserrat	0·3
Pitcairn Island	[1]—
St. Helena and Dependencies	1·0
Turks and Caicos Islands	1·1
TOTAL	3·3

[1]— means less than 0·05 per cent.
Source: British Aid Statistics 1987-88—1991-92.

Cambodia

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much overseas aid money has been provided to Cambodia to pay for mine clearance to date; and what plans his Department has to increase such aid without using money from existing budgets.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since 1991-92 we have provided some £260,000 for mine clearance in Cambodia. A further £232,520 has been committed for expenditure this financial year.

Self-build Projects

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what level of overseas development funding for each year from 1979-80 was allocated to self-build projects in developing countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: ODA does not maintain separate records of expenditure on self-build projects. These come within the category of low-cost housing. Figures for expenditure on low-cost housing are only available from 1987-88 and are as follows:

	£
1987-88	768,000
1988-89	1,232,000
1989-90	1,137,000
1990-91	1,239,000
1991-92	1,080,000

In addition Commonwealth Development Corporation expenditure in the housing sector has been:

	£
1987-88	2,290,000
1988-89	1,670,000
1989-90	1,250,000
1990-91	1,600,000
1991-92	Nil

East Timor

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been given to the people of East Timor in the years following its annexation by Indonesia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None of Britain's aid to Indonesia has been used for projects in East Timor in the years since its annexation in 1975, but we are prepared to consider providing financial support for non-governmental organisations who might operate there.

With our EC partners, HMG continues to follow developments, including human rights, in East Timor closely and welcomes the resumption, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, of the Indonesian-Portuguese dialogue.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Information Technology

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee if he will make a statement on the information technology facilities currently available to hon. Members.

Mr. Waller: It is for Members to acquire their information technology facilities, making use of the office costs allowance.

The computer officer is available to offer Members informal advice on the acquisition and use of IT equipment. The Information Committee has also published guidelines for Members, which have recently been updated and are incorporated in the "Members' Handbook".

In my reply to the hon. Member on 19 January 1993 at columns 154-55 I referred to computer services accessible via the Library. In the course of that response I also drew attention to the pilot project for a parliamentary data and video network (PDVN) at present being undertaken at 7 Millbank. This is available to Members and their staff whose offices are located at 7 Millbank and who have direct cabling to the network. In addition to database services, which include POLIS and *Hansard* on CD-ROM, the network also provides electronic mail and outgoing fax facilities.

The PDVN pilot project is to be reviewed by the Information Committee towards the end of the year as part of its current inquiry into the network.

EDUCATION

University Colleges

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when a decision will be taken about submissions made by the Standing Conference of Principals in Higher Education about the use of the title university college in their nomenclature; when the submissions were first received by his Department; how many colleges will be affected by the changes; and what criteria are to be used in determining the right of a college to such a title.

Mr. Boswell: The submission of the Standing Conference of Principals was received on 19 March 1993. Under its proposals, all publicly funded higher education colleges would be eligible to adopt a "university college" title. I hope to be in a position to reply shortly to the chairman of the standing conference.

Student Loans

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations he has received on the subject of student loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend receives occasional representations on the subject of student loans.

Computers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average ratio of computers to students in secondary schools and further and higher education establishments.

Mr. Forth: In March 1992, the latest date for which information is available, the average micro:pupil ratio in maintained secondary schools in England was 1:13. Information for further education establishments is not available on the same basis. It is estimated that the workstation:student ratio in further education colleges in March 1992 was generally in the range from 1:10 to 1:15. Information for higher education establishments is not collected centrally.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children with special educational needs had their needs first identified by *(a)* parents, *(b)* doctors/paediatricians, *(c)* educational psychologists, *(d)* school staff and *(e)* others.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children with special educational needs had their needs identified at *(a)* below the age of five years and *(b)* above the age of five years in the latest convenient period.

Mr. Forth: In the calendar year 1991 11 per cent. of children for whom statements of special educational needs were made for the first time were under the age of five whilst the majority—89 per cent.—were five or over. It is not possible to tell how many of the total number of children aged five and over who currently have statements received them for the first time when they were under five.

Bullying

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will consider appointing special staff to deal with the problem of bullying in schools: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Headteachers are responsible for securing acceptable standards of behaviour and conduct by pupils. The Government expect schools to deal firmly with bullying. To help them do so, the Department issued "Action Against Bullying" packs to all schools in England in July 1992. Further guidance material is in preparation. The Department has no plans to appoint specialist staff, but local education authorities could bid for support for whole-school action on bullying under the reducing truancy category of the Department's grants for education support and training (GEST) scheme for 1993-94. A number of approved projects incorporate such a component.

Science Exchanges

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the proportion of science exchanges proposed in the expanded TEMPUS programme of the European Commission; and how many expanded TEMPUS programme of the European Commission; and how many science-based exchanges involving United Kingdom projects are currently in place.

Mr. Boswell: Although applications for projects under the extended TEMPUS programme, TEMPUS II, have not yet been made, United Kingdom institutions are currently participating in 158 projects in science and related subjects under the existing programme.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Tax Relief

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for South Hams dated 15 March concerning the treatment for tax relief purposes by the Inland Revenue of the interest payable on home mortgages.

Mr. Dorrell: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 14 May.

Corporation Tax

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish a table setting out the total foreign exchange liabilities, broken down by currency, of companies liable to United Kingdom corporation tax;

(2) if he will publish a table setting out the total foreign exchange liabilities of companies liable to United Kingdom corporation tax, broken down by category of business of those companies;

(3) what estimate he has made of the ratio of foreign exchange liabilities of companies liable to United Kingdom corporation tax to their total liabilities.

Mr. Dorrell: Comprehensive information is not available in the form requested. But information is given on total financial liabilities and foreign currency lending from United Kingdom banks along with a breakdown of foreign currency bank lending. Dollars represent the main foreign currency for bank lending.

Liabilities at end 1992 Q4 (£ billion)

	Total	*Lending by banks*
Industrial and commercial sector	1,117·3	36·9
Other financial institutions	1,108·5	28·3

Source: Financial Statistics May 1993, Tables 14.6 and 14.7

As regards the industry breakdown, information is available only on foreign currency lending by United Kingdom banks to United Kingdom residents. This is given for March 1993.

	£ million
Energy and Water supplies	4,649
Construction	1,956
Garages distribution, hotels and catering	8,750
Transport and communications	2,948
Manufacturing industry	11,615
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	94
Financial	32,009
Business and other services (excluding central and local government services)	5,325
Total of above	67,346

Source: Bank of England Press Notice 14 May 1993.

Charities

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of tax credits on share dividends becoming available to charities in each of the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 were claimed in the same year.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Tax Computations

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will set out the criteria on which the Board of Inland Revenue will accept tax computations rounded to the nearest £1,000.

Mr. Dorrell: The Inland Revenue is prepared to accept computations of business profits for tax purposes in figures rounded to the nearest £1,000 from single businesses or companies with an annual turnover of not less than £5 million, where rounding at least to that extent has been used in preparing their accounts. The turnover of members of a group will not be aggregated for applying this £5 million threshold. Where turnover fluctuates either side of the threshold, rounding can be used for a period of account if the turnover for either that year or the immediately previous year is above the limit. Turnover comprises gross receipts including investment and estate income, as well as trading receipts.

The Inland Revenue will only accept rounding in any particular case if the basis adopted is satisfactory. Rounded computations from such businesses must be accompanied by a certificate made by the person preparing the computations which:

states the basis on which the rounding has been done; confirms that this basis is unbiased, that it has been applied consistently and that it has been used in a manner which, in all the circumstances, produces a fair result for tax purposes; and if the rounding was done by computer, states the progam or software used.

In subsequent years if there have been no changes in the basis or in the software, the certificate need only confirm that the rounding has been done on the same basis as before.

The Inland Revenue is prepared to accept rounded figures only in relation to the computation of the profits of the business, including in the case of companies, non-case I items. They cannot accept rounded figures in relation to the computation of tax payable or of any other figure of tax.

Nor can they accept rounded figures, in relation to any other aspect of the tax computations, where rounding would impede the proper application of the relevant legislation or where it would normally be necessary to go back to the underlying records to do the computation, and thus there would be no reduction in the compliance burden in allowing the use of round sums. Rounding is not therefore acceptable in the following:

— computations of chargeable gains (since precise dates on which expenditure is incurred are needed for indexation allowances purposes); rounding can however be accepted in relation to the incidental costs of acquisition and disposal;

— computations of tax credit relief: while individual items of foreign income (including profits of overseas branches and, for the purpose of calculating underlying tax rates, dividends paid by overseas companies and the profits of those companies) may be rounded, computations of credit relief must continue to distinguish the individual items of income and to show the exact amounts of foreign tax for which credit is claimed so that the rules for limiting the credit can be properly applied;

— computations required for purposes of the Accrued Income Scheme (Section 710-728, ICTA 1988);

— aspects of capital allowances computations where precise figures are required, for example by the statute or where rounding might work unfairly because more than one taxpayer is involved and different bases could be used by each. One case where the statute requires the use of precise figures is the expensive car provisions in Sections 34-36 CAA 1990. However in any capital allowances apportionment case it would be open to the taxpayer to demonstrate to the Inspector that, taking all the circumstances into account, including those of any other party, the use of rounded figures did not lead to a result that was materially different from the statutory position. For example, in the case of the industrial buildings one-quarter rule (section 18(7) CAA 1990), the Inspector would want to be satisfied that the use of rounding alone did not reduce the non-qualifying expenditure to one-quarter or less of the total expenditure (and thereby enable the whole of the expenditure to attract allowances).

— the application of the statutory amount in Section 748 (i) (d) ICTA 1988 in relation to a controlled foreign company.

Exceptionally other circumstances may arise where rounding would not satisfy the tests in the preceding paragraph. In those circumstances the inspector may insist that roundings are not used.

These arrangements will continue into pay and file. Subject to the exceptions provided in the two previous paragraphs, rounded figures from the accounts may be used in the computation of trading profits and losses, each category of income, management expenses and charges. Where appropriate, these figures will of course require adjustments to the "received" or "paid" basis. Group relief or relief for losses from other periods should be on the actual sums surrendered or brought forward, or carried back. No rounding should take place in the return form itself—for example, in the allocation of profits to financial years—or in any arithmetic that precedes such entries, for example, a computation of marginal small companies relief.

Where arrangements on the use of rounding have already been agreed, locally with inspectors these may continue to operate in the short term, but must come to an end for all periods ending after 31 May 1995.

African Debt

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the British Government have to assist Africa in reducing its debt burden; and if he will make it his policy to secure international agreement for Africa's debt burden being written off.

Mr. Nelson: At the Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in September 1990, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, then Chancellor, proposed a reduction in the stock of eligible debt of two thirds. In December 1991, the Paris Club of creditor countries agreed to allow creditors to provide the equivalent of 50 per cent. cancellation of eligible debts consolidated under each agreement. Seventeen countries have so far benefited from Trinidad terms, including 13 of the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Under these agreements over $3 billion of sub-Saharan African debt has been rescheduled by the Paris Club, cancelling over $1 billion during the lifetime of the agreements. The Trinidad terms also include an undertaking by creditors to consider a reduction in the stock of eligible debt after a period of proven financial and economic responsibility of three to four years.

The Government are, however, aware that for some of the poorest and most severely indebted countries Trinidad terms as currently applied will not be enough. For this reason we are pursuing with our creditor country colleagues improvements in the terms. Specifically, we would like to see the full Trinidad terms implemented and earlier action on reducing the total stock of debt for debtors who have a good track record.

The Government have also cancelled nearly £200 million of old aid debts owed by sub-Saharan African countries which are successfully pursuing sound policies of reform. Altogether, we have relieved developing countries of the burden of about £1·1 billion of old aid loans. New aid to such countries is now provided only in the form of grants.

Audio-visual Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage the retail price of audio-visual goods has fallen since January 1987; and what has been the market share of British industry in the supply of such goods in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson: The retail prices index for audio-visual equipment fell by 17·2 per cent. between January 1987 and March 1993, the latest date for which information is available. Information on the market share of British industry in the supply of such goods is not available in the form requested.

Treasury Costs

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the cost of running the Treasury in each year since 1987.

Mr. Nelson: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1987-88	34·673
1988-89	38·040
1989-90	39·326
1990-91	44·969
1991-92	55·927
[1]1992-93	55·675

[1] Forecast outturn.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect of rises in exchange rates on output and employment in *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* the rest of the economy since February.

Mr. Nelson: There are a large number of influences on economic activity at any one time, and it is impossible properly to assess the effect of exchange rate changes in isolation. But there are encouraging signs, in the figures for manufacturing output and GDP as well as in other indicators, that the economy is beginning to recover across a broad front.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Britain was free to determine its own monetary policy as a member of the exchange rate mechanism; and what proposals he has for changing the rules of the exchange rate mechanism to allow the pursuit of an independent monetary policy.

Mr. Nelson: Membership of the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) is a matter of choice, not obligation. It is not possible to pursue an independent monetary policy without regard to the exchange rate, inside or outside the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policy objectives underlie the Government's purpose in raising nominal and real exchange rates; and if he will estimate by how much the public sector borrowing requirement increased as a result of the increase in nominal and real exchange rates since February.

Mr. Nelson: The objective of the Government's monetary policy is to keep underlying inflation with a range of 1 to 4 per cent. and to bring it down to the lower part of that range by the end of the current Parliament. Short-term interest rates are set in order to meet this objective. The exchange rate is one of the indicators taken into account in assessing monetary conditions, but there is no target for the nominal or real exchange rate. A higher exchange rate reduces the sterling cost of public expenditure incurred in foreign currencies, but this is only one of a number of influences affecting the size of the PSBR.

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what evidence he has of the effect on the balance of payments on tourism of changes in the real exchange rate measured in terms of export unit values; and if he will publish a table showing imports and exports of tourism in cash terms and as a percentage of gross overseas products for each year since 1970, together with the balance of payments in current account on a corresponding basis; to what extent the figures are likely to be affected by the fall in the real exchange rate since September 1992, as measured by changes in the nominal exchange rate and in the real exchange rate weighted by the percentage change in import and export unit values in trade on manufactures with non-EC countries; and what is his forecast for the increase in output in the United Kingdom tourist industry for 1993 and 1994.

Mr. Nelson: The most recent figures for the balance of payments including the analysis of the components of services trade, are shown in CSO's "UK Economic Accounts", tables B1 and B5. The FSBR forecast that the balance on services trade, which includes travel and tourism, would improve in volume terms in 1993, in part because of the improvement in competitiveness since last September. Forecasts for output and employment at the tourist industry level are not available.

Outstanding Tax Liabilities

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will arrange a meeting between the collector of taxes at the Inland Revenue south-west offices and Dr. M. R. Cross of the Diving Disease Research Centre at Fort Bovisand to discuss payment, in instalments, of outstanding tax liabilities.

Mr. Dorrell: It is not for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to arrange such meetings. However, I understand that the collector of taxes will be contacting Dr. Cross to arrange a meeting.

House Prices

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much *(a)* house prices and *(b)* the cost of dwelling insurance and ground rent, as measured by the retail prices index, have risen since January 1987; and if he will provide separate figures for dwelling insurance and ground rent.

Mr. Nelson: House prices are not used directly in the compilation of the retail prices index. The United Kingdom all dwellings mix-adjusted house price index, published by the Department of the Environment, rose by 48 per cent. between the first quarter of 1987 and the first quarter of 1993.

Between January 1987 and March 1993, the latest date for which information is available, the dwelling insurance and ground rent section of the retail prices index increased by 97·9 per cent. Separate figures for dwelling insurance and for ground rent are not available.

Foreign Holidays

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on United Kingdom employment and on the balance of payments since 1986 of the increase in the price of foreign holidays since 13 January 1987.

Mr. Nelson: A price index for foreign holidays has only been compiled from January this year following the recommendation of the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee. The price of foreign holidays is but one factor among many which may affect the balance of payments and the level of employment.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what distinction he makes between United Kingdom monetary policy and membership of the exchange rate mechanism in the context of stage two of economic and monetary union.

Mr. Nelson: Article 3(1) of the protocol to the Treaty on European Union (Cm 1934) setting out the statutes of the European Monetary Institute provides that monetary policy would remain the responsibility of national authorities in stage 2 of economic and monetary union. It would remain a matter for national authorities to decide whether they wished their currency to participate in the exchange rate mechanism.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government propose to take to stop insider trading; and if he will introduce legislation *(a)* requiring public companies to notify their shareholders of significant changes in their circumstances to reach them not later than the information is released to the stock exchange and *(b)* prohibiting meetings with representatives of such companies by investment analysts able to acquire information about a company which is not made available earlier or at exactly the same time to all the company's private shareholders.

Mr. Nelson: Insider dealing has been illegal since 1980. The Criminal Justice Bill which is currently before Parliament will replace the existing legislation and bring our law on insider dealing into line with the EC directive on the subject.

Requirements already exist to ensure that information relating to significant changes in the circumstances of a company which is listed on the stock exchange is made available to the company's actual and potential shareholders: a company must make available to the public any information necessary to enable shareholders and the public to appraise the position of the company and

to avoid the establishment of a false market. By virtue of part IV of the Financial Services Act, this requirement has statutory effect.

Such information is notified by companies to the stock exchange which has arrangements for disseminating it through news vendors and press agencies. Information may also be given directly by a company to news vendors, press agencies and others at the same time as it is given to the stock exchange.

The Government believe that contact between a company and investment analysts and institutional investors can play a useful and valuable role in improving their understanding of its businesses and strategies. Information which should be the subject of a public announcement should not be disclosed at such meetings.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what period the new retail prices index for foreign holidays measures the increase in the price of such holidays; for what reason table 18.2 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" did not give figures for the period before February; if he will publish *(a)* the corresponding figures for January 1987 and August 1992 and *(b)* the items which are covered under this heading; how the information is obtained; and what weight is given to different kinds of such holidays.

Mr. Nelson: Foreign holidays were introduced into the retail prices index with effect from February 1993. Table 18·2 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" should have made it clear that the price index for foreign holidays is calculated on the base January 1993=100. No earlier figures are available. The holidays included in the foreign holidays index, as indicators, are carefully chosen to be representative of those holiday destinations visited by United Kingdom citizens. The importance of individual holidays is determined by information from the international passenger survey, tour operators and travel agents. In 1993 the weight attached to foreign holidays in the retail prices index is 30 out of 1,000. This reflects expenditures reported by households in the continuous family expenditure survey.

The report of the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee (Cm 2142) includes a description of the method used to construct the index for foreign holidays. Copies of the report are available in the House Library.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Waller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies are now being required to lodge security by guarantee or a cash deposit with Customs and Excise towards future VAT returns, in order to continue to supply goods and services under the Value Added Tax Act 1983.

Sir. John Cope: For the year ending 31 March 1993, Customs and Excise required 1,176 of the 1·6 million (0·07 per cent.) VAT registered businesses to provide security.

VAT Division (Jobs)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the value added tax division, Customs and Excise to be completed in Liverpool; and how many jobs will be provided.

Sir John Cope *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The VAT headquarters building at Queens dock, Liverpool is expected to be completed in August 1993.

Three-hundred-and-fifty jobs have already been relocated from Southend to Liverpool and during the next 18 months some 300 further jobs will follow. The new building will also house the VAT headquarters staff currently located in Bootle.

Council Tax

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *507*, regarding the length of time taken to hear council tax banding appeals, if he will now make it his policy to set *(a)* a target by which time all appeals must be determined and *(b)* a target for the maximum length of time an individual appeal will take from submission to determination.

Mr. Robin Squire: I have been asked to reply.

I am anxious to ensure that appeals are dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible. What can be achieved will depend on how many proposals are received, but I intend to set firm targets as soon as the likely caseload can be estimated with reasonable certainty.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BST Products

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *427*, if he will set out the reason he was given by the Medicines Commission for its decision that BST products manufactured by the companies Lilly Industries Ltd. and Monsanto SA/NV meet the medicines licensing criteria.

Mr. Gummer: The additional data presented to the Medicines Commission by the companies in support of their applications for licences for BST products were judged as satisfying the concerns previously expressed by the Veterinary Products Committee, particularly in relation to the incidence of mastitis. On this basis the Commission advised that the Medicines Act licensing criteria of safety, quality and efficacy were met.

Food Supplements

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to commission a second report from an impartial working group on those issues covered by the Denner report.

Mr. Soames: I have no plans to commission a second report on dietary supplements. The Denner report has been used as a basis for consultation and it allowed us to gather a wide range of views on the question of dietary supplements.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the purpose of the recent meeting between his officials and Mr. G. Latham and Mr. M. Hanssen of the Health Food

Manufacturers Association and at which the Denner report was discussed; what conclusions were reached at the meeting; what was agreed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Officials were asked to meet the President of the Health Food Manufacturers' Association, Mr. Hanssen, and the Chairman of the Council for Responsible Nutrition, Mr. Latham, to discuss a range of subjects of interest to these organisations. The meeting was essentially an exchange of information.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement setting out the procedure which he will adopt and the organisations which will be consulted in future on any proposal to restrict the availability of food supplements.

Mr. Soames: It is MAFF policy to consult widely on all food safety matters. Our consultations on dietary supplements have involved over 160 organisations. However, the Government must retain the right to act immediately if necessary to protect consumers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that the House is made aware of any consultation process which he undertakes on food supplements and that right hon. and hon. Members have the opportunity to submit their views and those of their constituents prior to any decisions being taken; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: A public announcement was made on 27 March 1991 that the report on the working group on dietary supplements and health foods had been published and that the next step would be a wide public consultation. Copies of the report were placed in the Library of the House together with a copy of a statement summarising the recommendations and the Government's proposed follow up action. This included details of a review of certain herbal ingredients by the Committee on Toxicity and the Food Advisory Committee.

On 2 March this year I announced to the House the action I had taken in respect of comfrey products—*Official Report*, column 79. The Government will continue to keep the House fully informed of developments in this area.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what plans he has to seek to introduce a ban on substances mentioned in the Denner report in addition to comfrey; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to restrict the availability of *(a)* fennel, *(b)* blue flag, *(c)* juniper oil, *(d)* lobelia, *(e)* uva ursi, *(f)* zanthxylum, *(g)* pokeroot, *(h)* berberis/hydrastis, *(i)* berberis, *(j)* black cohose, *(k)* blue cohose, *(l)* bloodroot, *(m)* fumaria, *(n)* helonias, *(o)* hydrastis, *(p)* juniper, *(q)* kelp, *(r)* mugwort and *(s)* pennyroyal, or products containing extracts or concentrations of these foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I have no such plans. A review of the substances referred to in the Denner report which includes all those listed by the hon. Member is continuing. No decision has yet been taken on their continued availability.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he expects to receive any report from the liquidators of BCCI concerning the meeting on 27 May.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My officials have asked the liquidators to report the outcome of the meeting summoned pursuant to the provisions of section 142 of the Insolvency Act, 1986 to be held on 27 May 1993.

Ammunition

Mr. Rogers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to investigate the explosives propellants and related end products—EPREP—ammunition cartel; and what agreements have been made by his Department in relation to this agreement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am aware of no such ammunition cartel. The EPREP agreement expired in March this year.

Trade Boycotts

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he is taking to assist British companies trading with Israel to ensure that United Kingdom companies are now placed on the same basis as United States companies in respect of the lifting of the secondary and tertiary boycotts by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Mr. Needham: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, as members of the Gulf Co-operation Council, are obliged by the EC/GCC co-operation agreement, 1988, to give most-favoured nation treatment to EC member states. This means that any concessions on the Arab boycott granted to United States companies by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or other members of the GCC must be extended to exports form the United Kingdom and other EC member states.

Member countries of the GCC also have a treaty obligation not to discriminate between EC member states.

We take advantage of bilateral contacts with GCC countries to point out that we object to the boycott as an unwelcome trade barrier and to remind them of their obligations not to discriminate against or between EC member states.

Company Directors (Disqualifications)

Ms Corston: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions in the last five years for which records are available he has exercised his discretionary power in applying to the courts for a disqualification order against a company director.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The Secretary of State has issued the following number of directions to proceed under sections 6 and 8 of the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986.

Financial year	*Number of directions to proceed* *Section 6*	*Section 8*
1988-89	416	2
1989-90	462	—
1990-91	499	9
1991-92	700	—
1992-93	564	7

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people are employed in the British *(a)* aero engine and *(b)* airframe industries.

Mr. Sainsbury: The latest official employment figures from the "Report on the Census of Production"—available in the House of Commons Library—show employment of 174,000 in the aerospace industry in 1990. The figures do not differentiate between the aeroengine and airframe industries.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the amount of financial backing given to the aerospace industry in each year since 1979 at constant prices.

Mr. Sainsbury: Financial support given to the aerospace industry by DTI for each year since 1979 in constant (1991-92) prices are as follows. The figures include launch aid[1], civil aircraft research and development, regional assistance, and other miscellaneous DTI schemes. Figures are calculated by using the GDP deflator whole economy in financial years published by HM Treasury (Autumn Statement).

DTI support for Aerospace sector Constant prices for price levels in 1991-92 Real terms

Financial year	*£ million*
1979-80	278·2
1980-81	153·4
1981-82	256·6
1982-83	141·7
1983-84	174·7
1984-85	163·9
1985-86	176·6
1986-87	184·3
1987-88	71·3
1988-89	130·1
1989-90	143·6
1990-91	136·0
1991-92	37·1
1992-93	[1]—6·9

[1] Launch Aid is repayable by levy payments on aircraft sales. Net Launch Aid figures for each year have been used (i.e. payments to companies minus levy receipts). For 1992-93 levy receipts exceeded payments.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the amount of money earned by aerospace exports in each year since 1979 at constant prices.

Mr. Sainsbury: Aerospace exports—civil and military—in each year since 1979 in constant, 1985, prices are:

Real exports

Year	*£ billion*
1979	4·0
1980	4·6
1981	3·2
1982	3·3
1983	3·3
1984	3·4
1985	3·8
1986	4·6
1987	4·7
1988	5·2
1989	7·1
1990	6·4
1991	6·3
1992	5·5

Figures are derived by calculating an implied retail price index from:
Business Monitor MQ10 for 1992
Business Monitor PAS 3640 for 1984–1991
Business Monitor PQ 3640 for 1981–1983
Business Monitor PQ 383 for 1979–1980

Overseas Trade Fairs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing expenditure by his Department on supporting participation by United Kingdom apparel and textile companies in overseas trade fairs in each of the last three years; and what comparable information is available on expenditure by the Governments of Germany, France and Italy.

Mr. Needham: The requested information is as follows:

Year	*Net expenditure £*	*Percentage of total support*
1990-91	1,145,676	9·7
1991-92	1,336,051	10·7
1992-93	1,595,332	12·2

No comparable information is available on expenditure incurred by the the Governments of Germany, France and Italy on supporting participation by apparel and textile companies at overseas trade fairs.

Export Promotion

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to complete his review of the three-times rule for export promotion; and what representations he has received from industry calling for *(a)* its retention and *(b)* its ending.

Mr. Needham: The three times rule, which limits the number of times a company may receive financial support under the trade fairs support scheme, will be taken into account in a planned evaluation which is expected to be completed during this financial year. Representations from industry have focused mainly on the modification, rather than retention of this rule.

German Packaging Ordinance

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what effect he raised the issue of the German packaging ordinance with his colleagues at the Industry Council on 4 May.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 13 May, *Official Report*, columns 533-34.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 5 June 1992, *Official Report*, columns *675-78*, on regional financial assistance, if he will update the table, to include spending on regional financial assistance at current and 1978-79 prices.

Mr. Sainsbury: Updated information on regional financial assistance from 1990-91 to 1992-93 at current prices and at 1978-79 prices is set out in the following tables. Information for the period 1978-79 to 1988-89 remains unchanged. The expenditure is gross of recoveries.

Table 1
Government Expenditure on Regional Financial Assistance to Industry at Current Prices[1]

£ million

Region	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern[5]	85·0	63·8	48·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	29·4	18·2	13·7
East Midlands	5·5	2·6	1·2
South West	9·0	8·3	8·2
West Midlands[2,3]	18·0	8·7	10·8
North West	57·5	49·5	36·8
England	204·4	151·1	119·0
Wales[6]	133·7	153·9	140·9
Scotland[6]	159·1	128·9	103·4
Great Britain[6]	497·2	433·9	363·3
Northern Ireland[6]	134·3	140·4	108·5
United Kingdom[6]	631·5	574·3	471·8

Table 2
Government Expenditure on Regional Financial Assistance to Industry at 1978-79 prices[1,4]

£ million

Region	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern[5]	33·6	23·7	17·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	11·6	6·7	4·9
East Midlands	2·2	1·0	0·4
South West	3·6	3·0	2·9
West Midlands[2,3]	7·1	3·2	3·9
North West	22·7	18·4	13·2
England	80·8	56·0	42·6
Wales	52·9	57·1	50·5
Scotland	62·9	47·8	37·0
Great Britain	196·6	160·9	130·1
Northern Ireland	53·1	52·1	38·8
United Kingdom	249·7	213·0	168·9

[1] All figures are gross and include payments to Nationalised Industries.
[2] Includes some minor expenditure in West Midlands in respect of Oswestry TTWA which ceased to be an Assisted Area in 1982-83.
[3] Certain TTWAs in the West Midlands were designated as Assisted Areas on 29 November 1984.
[4] Expenditure on a 1978-79 price basis for each year is calculated by applying the appropriate deflator to expenditure at current prices.
[5] Includes expenditure in Cumbria, otherwise shown within the totals for Northern Region.
[6] The figures given are provisional for 1992-93.
The items included in the expenditure are Regional Development Grants, Regional Selective Assistance and Regional Enterprise Grants; expenditure on Land and Factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation, the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales, and the Highlands and Islands Development Board.
Northern Ireland has a different range of financial incentives available and the items included are Industrial Development Board grants and loans, expenditure on land and factories, Share Capital Standard Capital Grants and Local Enterprise Development Unit grants and loans.

Table 3

Index	*1978-79 prices*
1978-79	100·0
1979-80	116·7
1980-81	138·1
1981-82	151·4
1982-83	162·2
1983-84	169·7
1984-85	178·2
1985-86	188·0
1986-87	194·2
1987-88	204·8
1988-89	219·6
1989-90	234·0
1990-91	252·8
1991-92	269·7
1992-93	279·1

River Safety

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department is taking to publish an account of progress in the implementation of recommendations made after major disasters as recommended in the Hayes report on river safety.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 11 May 1993]:* My Department has not been involved in the preparation of any Government response to the Hayes report.

Group 4

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade where the head offices of Group 4 Remand Services Ltd., Group 4 Remand Services Holdings Ltd. and Group 4 Securitas NV are registered.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The registered office address for both Group 4 Remand Services Limited and Group 4 Remand Services Holdings Limited is:

Farncombe House
Broadway
Worcestershire
WR12 7LJ

Group 4 Securitas NV is a foreign company and is not registered with Companies House.

Ice-cream

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the terms of reference, purpose and timetable for reporting on the current Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation into alleged monopolistic practices in the ice-cream industry.

Mr. Neil Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* On 7 May the Director General of Fair Trading referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission the supply in the United Kingdom of ice cream for immediate consumption. The Commission has been asked to report to the President of the Board of Trade, within 10 months, on whether a monopoly situation exists and whether practices in the market operate against the public interest.

A copy of the Director General's press release on the reference, which includes a copy of the terms of reference, is available in the House of Commons Library.

Trade (Croatia)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will give a breakdown of import and export trade between the United Kingdom and Croatia in the year beginning 1 April 1992.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Detailed information on United Kingdom trade with Croatia since January 1993 is published in "Business Monitor MM20, overseas trade statistics of the United Kingdom" which is available in the Library. Information is not available for earlier periods because Croatia was not separately identified from the rest of former Yugoslavia.

Investment (Advertisements)

Mr. McLeish: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will place in the Library the statistics used in the advertisement placed by Her Majesty's consulate general in Düsseldorf in the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt* promoting investment in Britain;

(2) if he will outline the principles governing the promotion of investment in Britain, through advertising in foreign newspapers;

(3) what was the cost of the advertisement recently placed in the German business newspaper *Handelsblatt* entitled "Niedrigere Lohnkosten in Grossbritannien";

(4) what discussions took place with the European Commission on the advertisements relating to inward investment placed in the German newspaper by Her Majesty's consulate general in Düsseldorf;

(5) if he will make a statement on the campaign by the Invest in Britain Bureau on inward investment including the annual costs of press and television advertising in Europe, America and Japan and the sources of information used; and which Government Department is responsible for the placing of advertising material.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The Department of Trade and Industry's Invest in Britain Bureau (IBB) is the principal Government organisation charged with the responsibility for attracting inward investment into the United Kingdom.

As part of a much wider promotional and marketing effort designed to maintain our position as the preferred location in Europe for internationally mobile investment projects, the bureau has undertaken regular advertising campaigns in North America and more recently in Europe.

During the 1992-93 financial year the IBB spent a total of £860,000 on press advertising in North America and Europe. No advertising was commissioned in Japan. No television advertising has been placed.

The cost of each of the IBB advertisements placed in *Handelsblatt* was around £4,600. Copies of the survey prepared by the Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft in Cologne, from which the statistics used in the *Handelsblatt* advertisement were taken, have been placed in the Library.

There have been no discussions with the European Commission about the advertising campaign.

PRIME MINISTER

Chevening House

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list and describe the items belonging to Chevening house which were auctioned on 10 May with their reserve price and the amounts which were received for each item at the auction.

The Prime Minister: The disposal of items of property from Chevening house is a matter for the trustees and not the Government.

My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal is the ex-officio chairman of the Chevening trustees and I will arrange for him to write to the hon. Member.

Security Services

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will introduce legislation to make the security services the subject of an annual debate in Parliament on the basis of an annual report; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There will be an opportunity for Parliament to debate such matters when legislation on the secret intelligence service and the Government communications headquarters is brought forward.

Salman Rushdie

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* the place, time and date when he met Salman Rushdie and *(b)* the length of the meeting; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I met Mr. Rushdie at the House of Commons on 11 May for about 40 minutes. Mr. Rushdie briefed me about the problems he faced and his approach to them. I underlined the Government's full support for Mr. Rushdie's fundamental rights as a British citizen and expressed concern that the Iranian authorities had failed to repudiate the incitement to his murder in the "fatwa" and the bounty which an Iranian organisation had offered. Mr. Rushdie expressed appreciation of the Government's support for him. The United Kingdom has a deep respect for Islam. I believe that Iran's behaviour towards Mr. Rushdie has done a disservice to that great religion.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 18 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television (Employment)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will estimate the employment in television in each of the past 10 years in *(a)* the BBC, *(b)* regional commercial broadcasters, *(c)* independent production companies and facilities and *(d)* in total.

Mr. Brooke: The number of staff employed by the BBC in each of the past 10 years is recorded in the BBC's annual reports, which are available in the Library. Information on *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)* is not held centrally; but I understand some 13,800 were employed by the ITV companies in 1982 and 11,100 in 1992.

Television Companies (Commitments)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will give a summary of the commitments made by successful television company bidders, including regional programming and programme origination.

Mr. Brooke: Each Channel 3 licence contains a summary of the commitments made. Copies are available from the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how the Independent Television Commission may vary or accept variations in commitments by or requirements of regional television companies; and how often he receives reports from the ITC.

Mr. Brooke: Section 33 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 makes provision for the Independent Television Commission to vary licence conditions. The procedures were described in the invitation to apply for the relevant licences and are in the issued licence. The ITC's annual reports must include reports on the extent to which ITV licensees have failed to comply with their licence conditions. The ITC also publishes a programme complaints and interventions report quarterly, and a television advertising complaints report monthly.

Television Licence Fees

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will allow residential homes for the elderly to make a single application for a reduced rate television licence covering all residents.

Mr. Brooke: Responsibility for the administration of the television licensing system, including the concessionary licence scheme, rests with the BBC. The existing application form for concessionary licences already provides for the managers of residential homes to make a single application covering all the residents. Each unit of accommodation in eligible homes requires a concessionary licence. We have no plans to amend the regulations on this, or any other, aspect of the concessionary scheme.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each month *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Only one parliamentary question has not received a substantive answer on the ground of disproportionate cost since this Department was set up in April 1992.

Radio (Asian Language)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many licences have been granted by the Radio Authority for stations broadcasting in an Asian language.

Mr. Brooke: Independent local radio provides eight 24-hour services for ethnic minorities. The extent to which they broadcast in an Asian language varies according to their promises of performance.

Radio Licences

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many applications for licences have *(a)* been granted by the Radio Authority, *(b)* been rejected by the Radio Authority and *(c)* what is the cost of licence application.

Mr. Brooke: The number of licences granted in any year by the Radio Authority are published in the annual report. On two occasions, the Radio Authority has decided not to award a local radio licence which it had advertised. The cost of a licence application fee varies according to the type of licence and the extent of the population coverage.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many licences the Radio Authority has granted; and what is the current licence fee.

Mr. Brooke: The Radio Authority's annual report for 1992 will be published soon and will give figures for the licences it issued during that year. By 11 January 1993, I understand that the Radio Authority had, since it was established, awarded two licences for national services, 25 local licences, 419 restricted service licences, eight licences for licensable sound programme services and 11 satellite licences. The authority also licensed 126 local radio services, which had earlier operated under contract to the Independent Broadcasting Authority. Licence fees are charged according to a tariff, published by the authority, which relates to the number of potential listeners for each service.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when the Radio Authority is going to make a decision about the west midlands franchise.

Mr. Brooke: The Radio Authority advertised the licence for the regional ILR service for the west midlands on 18 March. The closing date for applications is 6 July. The Radio Authority expects to announce who has been granted the licence by October 1993.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many franchises have been awarded by the Radio Authority.

Mr. Brooke: The Radio Authority does not award franchises. The annual report of the Radio Authority gives figures for the number of licences issued each year.

Palaces (Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage who is responsible for compliance with *(a)* fire regulations and *(b)* health and safety regulations in each of the historic palaces.

Mr. Key: Responsibility for compliance with fire safety legislation and health and safety legislation in the royal palaces for which I have a financial responsibility rests with the following bodies:

Royal Household
Buckingham Palace
Windsor Castle
St. James's Palace
Clarence House
Kensington Palace (private apartments)

Historic Royal Palaces Agency (an Executive Agency responsible to the Secretary of State for National Heritage)
Hampton Court Palace
Tower of London
Kensington Palace (State Apartments)
Banqueting House, Whitehall
Kew Palace and
Queen Charlotte's Cottage.

In the Tower of London, the Royal Armouries and the Ministry of Defence have some responsibilities in the areas which they occupy.

Everyman Theatre, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received about the future of the Everyman theatre, Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I have received two letters about the Everyman theatre, one from the chief executive of Liverpool city council and the other from the hon. Member. I am therefore aware of the financial difficulties confronting the theatre. However, central Government funding of the arts is undertaken, at arm's length, through the Arts Council. I understand that the council and the local authorities on Merseyside are currently engaged in constructive discussions about future funding arrangements for the Everyman and Playhouse theatres. I hope there will be a positive outcome.

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage by what percentage *(a)* rail fares, bus and coach fares, *(b)* non-food prices generally and *(c)* foreign holidays have changed since 13 January 1987; and what assessment he has made of the effect of relative price changes on employment and output in the United Kingdom tourist industry.

Mr. Key: The information on retail prices is published in the RPI "Business Monitor", in table 2, which is available in the Library. The Department has made no formal assessment of the effects of changes in public transport fares on tourism within the United Kingdom, but according to the United Kingdom tourism survey, the proportion of domestic tourism trips on one night or more that used train, bus or coach as their main mode of transport has been the same in each of the years 1989, 1990 and 1991, at 19 per cent. Between December 1986 and December 1992, the number of employees in employment in tourism-related industries rose by 19 per cent. The foreign holiday component of the retail prices index has only been in existence since January this year and so it is too early to assess any relationship between the price of foreign holidays and tourism employment and expenditure in the United Kingdom.

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what considerations she is taking into account in his review of statutory instruments on health and safety at work; if she will consolidate them into a smaller number of comprehensive documents, each covering a range of activities; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Commission has been invited to conduct a review of all existing health and safety legislation in order to: assess whether the law is still relevant and needed; assess the compliance and enforcement burdens on business of legislation which is still relevant and needed; to determine whether the potential benefits still justify these burdens; and whether repeal or simplification is possible without endangering acceptable health and safety standards. The Commission has been asked to take particular account of the needs of small firms.

The review is being taken forward in consultation with interested parties.

The Commission is aiming to substantially complete the review by April 1994, at which time my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, will receive a report on their findings and recommendations for the further rationalisation and modernisation of health and safety legislation.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many men and women, distinguishing between full-time and part-time employees and excluding all in training, were in employment in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* the latest date for which figures are available, in each travel-to-work area that covers an enterprise zone; and what were the figures for those unemployed in each case.

Mr. McLoughlin: Travel-to-work areas which wholly or partly cover enterprise zones are listed. Information on full-time and part-time employees and claimant unemployment for these areas can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Data on employment by ward-based travel-to-work area is available since September 1981 from the periodic censuses of employment. Monthly ward-based claimant count information is available on the unadjusted basis from June 1983 onwards.

Travel-to-work areas in the United Kingdom wholly or partly covering enterprise zones:
Medway and Maidstone
Dudley and Sandwell
Telford and Bridgenorth
Wellingborough and Rushden
Rotherham and Mexborough
Wakefield and Dewsbury
Accrington and Rossendale
Burnley
Pendle
Workington
Hartlepool
Sunderland
Haverfordwest
Shotton Flint and Rhyl
South Pembrokeshire
Swansea
Dundee
Greenock
Invergordon and Dingwall
Lanarkshire
Londonderry

Benefit

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many unemployment benefit *(a)* payments and *(b)* applications were made in each month since April 1990 in (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales and (iii) England.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the numbers of people in receipt of each type of benefit are available only on a quarterly basis and relate to the stock of claimants at a point in time and not the number of new claimants each month. This shows that about one in four of all unemployed claimants in each of England, Scotland and Wales is in receipt of unemployment benefit.

Information on the flows into claimant unemployment in each month by area is available from the NOMIS database in the Library. This information relates to the total numbers of people claiming unemployment-related benefits and national insurance credits at the employment service. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Youth Training

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are currently on YT schemes; and how many are awaiting places on YT schemes for each training and enterprise council area in England.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of young people who are currently on youth training (YT), and the number who are guaranteed a place and have been waiting for eight weeks or longer, for each training and enterprise council area in England, are provided in the following table.

In April there were 5,300 young people who had been waiting for a YT place for more than eight weeks compared with 32,500 last September. This is a commendable achievement which I hope will continue.

Young people on YT or waiting for a place on YT: 1993

TEC	*Number in training January 1993*[1]	*Waiting for more than 8 weeks April 1993*[2]
Avon	4,525	117
AZTEC	1,314	95
Barnsley and Doncaster	3,988	35
Bedfordshire	2,301	[3]164
Birmingham	[3]5,188	131
Bolton and Bury	2,624	19
Bradford	3,199	18
Calderdale and Kirklees	3,306	15
CAMBSTEC	1,158	54
Central England	1,495	19
Central London	1,628	[3]152
CEWTEC	3,419	12
CILNTEC	2,322	109
County Durham	4,188	71
Coventry and Warwicks	4,283	[3]86
Cumbria	3,755	6
Devon and Cornwall	6,945	[3]71
Dorset	2,658	15
Dudley	1,863	1
ELTEC	4,214	29
Essex	6,572	329
Gloucester	3,023	11
Greater Nottingham	3,670	35
Greater Peterborough	1,611	17

TEC	Number in training January 1993[1]	Waiting for more than 8 weeks April 1993[2]
Hampshire	6,085	[5]304
HAWTEC	2,076	[5]30
Heart of England	2,139	24
Hertfordshire	3,479	164
Humberside	6,245	36
Isle of Wight	576	28
Kent	5,695	183
LAWTEC	5,643	28
Leeds	2,799	26
Leicestershire	5,020	[5]31
LETEC	4,534	380
Lincolnshire	3,789	39
Manchester	6,504	[5]93
Merseyside	7,848	47
METROTEC	2,184	6
Milton Keynes and North Bucks	1,515	[5]42
Norfolk/Waveney	3,963	31
NORMIDTEC	[3]3,289	9
North Derbyshire	1,825	39
North London	1,657	[5]79
North Nottinghamshire	3,043	55
North West London	879	107
North Yorkshire	2,843	[5]59
Northamptonshire	2,478	[5]39
Northumberland	2,094	58
Oldham	1,840	48
QUALITEC	1,621	16
Rochdale	1,729	15
Rotherham	1,811	9
Sandwell	1,951	20
South and East Cheshire	2,640	0
Sheffield	3,494	147
Shropshire	2,491	24
SOLOTEC	2,656	194
Somerset	2,374	[5]114
South Derbyshire	3,172	[5]29
South Thames	2,744	451
Staffordshire	7,934	6
Stockport and High Peak	2,534	19
Suffolk	2,837	13
Surrey	1,934	[5]99
Sussex	4,425	86
Teesside	5,716	56
Thames Valley Enterprise	3,327	[5]198
Tyneside	[4]3,289	[5]59
Wakefield	1,872	18
Walsall	1,350	12
Wearside	2,689	0
West London	2,415	48
Wiltshire	2,385	[5]68
Wolverhampton	1,858	6

Sources:
[1] Information from TEC Management Information return 31 January 1993 (Provisional).
[2] Information from Careers Service Management return (Supplement) 17 April 1993.
[3] Information from TEC Management Information return 3 January 1993.
[4] Information from TEC Management Information return 6 December 1992.
[5] These figures are subject to final confirmation.

Health and Safety Regulations

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is her estimate of the cost to British industry of health and safety regulations.

Mr. McLoughlin: No estimate of the cost to British industry of health and safety regulations as a whole exists at present.

Health and Safety Executive (Prosecutions)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions were brought by the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last five years; and what percentage of *(a)* cases and *(b)* contested cases resulted in prosecutions.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following table gives the information requested for the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) factory, agricultural and quarry inspectorates. Figures for 1992-93 will be available later this year. Information for the other HSE inspectorates is not readily available. Prosecutions have been interpreted as informations laid.

Number of informations laid by HSE's Factory, Agricultural and Quarry Inspectors and the percentage of informations that resulted in conviction 1987-92[2][3]

Year	Number of informations laid	Percentage of informations resulting in conviction	Percentage of not-guilty pleas resulting in conviction
1987-88	2,321	88	41
1988-89	2,298	90	61
1989-90	2,547	88	49
1990-91	2,278	86	47
[1]1991-92	2,388	88	47

Notes:
[1] = provisional.
[2] Years are from 1 April to 31 March.
[3] Quarries Inspectorates are only included from 1990-91.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by her Department wholly or partly on the grounds of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The figures for parliamentary questions not answered wholly on the grounds of disproportionate cost, in each of the last 18 months, are given in the following table:

Month	Number
1991	
November	0
December	1
1992	
January	0
February	0
March	1
April	0
May	1
June	0
July	3
August	0
September	0
October	0
November	8
December	8
1993	
January	0
February	1
March	3
April	1
Total	27

This represents less than 1 per cent. of all parliamentary questions asked in the same period.

The figure for parliamentary questions where a substantive answer was not provided partly on the grounds of disproportionate cost is not recorded.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the monthly United Kingdom unemployment figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of unemployment in the construction industry in *(a)* the Riverside constituency, *(b)* the Liverpool travel-to-work area and *(c)* Merseyside at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Available estimates from the autumn 1992 labour force survey show that in Merseyside there were 11,000 people unemployed on the ILO definition whose last previous employment had been in the construction industry.

Information for the other areas is not available from the labour force survey.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans Her Majesty's Government have to reduce unemployment on Merseyside; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The overall policy of the Department, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, is to promote a free and flexible labour market that is designed to help encourage employment in Merseyside as in all areas. In addition the Department provides a range of employment and training programmes and local initiatives, through the employment service and training and enterprise councils, to help people increase their skills, and equip themselves for work. From April 1993 this range of measures was enhanced by an extra half million opportunities.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the level of unemployment in the Liverpool, Riverside constituency at the latest available date.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* In March 1993, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 7,427 claimant unemployed people in the Liverpool Riverside constituency. This figure is on the unadjusted basis.

Unemployed Graduates

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work training schemes specifically for unemployed graduates are currently in operation; how many graduates are currently participating in such schemes; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* None of the Department's training schemes for unemployed people is aimed specifically at graduates. Training and enterprise councils may support individual programmes designed to cater for unemployed graduates but information on such programmes is not held centrally.

Co-operatives

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment her Department has made of the employment potential of co-operatives.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The Department has made no such assessment.

Youth Training

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of young people currently on youth training schemes and the numbers awaiting places on youth training schemes in each TEC area in England and Wales and LEC area in Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 19 April 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I am giving to my hon. Friend the Member for Saffron Walden today.

The information for Scotland and Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales.

Youth Unemployment

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the youth unemployment rates in actual numbers and percentages for each United Kingdom standard planning region and for each of the past five years.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Information on the level of claimant unemployment by age in each region is available from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Information on claimant unemployment by age, expressed as a percentage of the work force in a particular age band, are available on a quarterly basis but only at national level, and only for standard age bands. These data are published in the *Employment Gazette*—table 2.15.

Labour force survey data on regional unemployment rates by age and sex, using the ILO measure of unemployment, are published regularly in table 7.15 of "Regional Trends".

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will supply figures for the youth unemployment rates, by actual numbers and by percentages, in each EC country for the five most recent years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The extent of the readily available, comparable information is given in the following tables:

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Unemployment levels amongst 14-24 year olds in EC countries (ILO Definition)					
Belgium	130	99	79	71	68
Denmark	52	51	66	64	63
Germany	411	365	280	232	173
Greece	125	135	135	128	134
Spain	1,411	1,334	1,047	956	895
France	888	784	670	672	615
Ireland	85	80	66	59	70
Italy	1,388	1,419	1,305	1,151	1,180
Luxembourg	2	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Netherlands	248	196	181	156	154
Portugal	180	146	116	103	82
United Kingdom	1,026	828	642	618	712
Unemployment rates amongst 14-24 year olds in EC countries (ILO definition)					
Belgium	25·4	11·1	11·5	11·5	11·0
Denmark	8·9	8·5	11·5	11·5	11·5
Germany	7·5	6·8	5·5	4·6	3·7
Greece	24·8	25·8	24·8	23·2	24·6
Spain	43·5	41·1	32·3	31·8	30·5
France	23·4	22·1	19·6	19·6	19·6
Ireland	26·0	25·3	21·9	19·5	23·2
Italy	33·9	33·4	31·9	29·0	28·2
Luxembourg	5·4	[1]4·7	[1]3·3	[1]3·6	[1]2·6
Netherlands	17·1	14·4	13·4	11·4	11·3
Portugal	17·4	14·4	11·7	10·4	8·7
United Kingdom	16·2	13·2	10·3	10·4	13·9

[1] Estimate.

Source: EUROSTAT Labour Force Survey 1983-1991.

Note: These statistics are compiled from each country's Labour Force Survey and relate to "14-24 year olds" at the time of the survey. The ILO definition of unemployment used in the Labour Force Survey relates to people who are; (a) without a paid job; (b) available to start work in the next fortnight; and (c) have looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Consultation

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the consultation process he will apply during the six-week period following receipt of recommendations from the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On submission of its report the commission notifies interested parties, by way of public notice and by letter to all those who participated in the review, that there is a further six-week period during which written representations may be made to my right hon. Friend.

Children (Speech Disorders)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of the report by Mr. Michael Gibson of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools on educational provision for children with speech and language disorders in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The inspection of the educational provision for children with speech and language disorders in Scotland by HM inspectorate of schools is still in progress. Once it is complete and a report published I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

WALES

Small Businesses

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate has been made of the percentage contribution small businesses in Wales have made to the Welsh gross domestic product in each year since 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: No such estimate has been made. But figures published in the "Business Monitor—Size analysis of United Kingdom Businesses" (PA 1003) since 1989 show that businesses with a turnover below £250,000 have consistently accounted for over 80 per cent. of the number of businesses in Wales.

Dental Services

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on dental service provision in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh Office has received 68 representations since 1 April 1992 about dental services in Gwynedd. The Government are committed to a full NHS dental service and the Secretary of State has given approval for the Gwynedd family health services authority to employ four salaried dentists to help meet NHS service needs within its area.

Health Service (Industrial Relations)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his response to the request from staff side officers of the joint staff consultative council for the Welsh health service for a meeting to discuss industrial relations; and what were the reasons for giving that response.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply which I gave on the 11 May at column *440* to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith).

Local Government Reform

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a Green Paper on strategic planning in Wales as part of the reform of local government.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Local Government White Paper

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has received on the resolution passed at the European Assembly of the Regions bureau meeting in Hungary on 30 April regarding his White Paper, "Local Government in Wales", Cm 2155.

Mr. David Hunt: I have just seen a copy of the press release issued by the Assembly of Welsh Counties following the meeting in Budapest.

Agri-environmental Agency

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to establish an agri-environmental agency in Wales to oversee the work undertaken by each agri-environmental scheme operational in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Tourism

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what matters in regard to protection and enhancement of the environment in Wales have been taken into account in the preparation of his Tourism 2000 strategy report.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In preparing the "Tourism 2000 Strategy" the Wales tourist board issued a series of consultative papers and held several seminars on key themes and principles to be covered by the strategy. Tourism and the environment was one such theme.

As the hon. Gentleman may be aware my right hon. Friend is to launch the WTB's consultative strategy on the 26 May, which will give all those within the industry a further opportunity to comment on all aspects of the strategy. The final strategy will issue in the autumn.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were confirmed in *(a)* Pembrokeshire and *(b)* Wales in each quarter since 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures for BSE are recorded on a county basis, and thus separate figures for Pembrokeshire are not produced. The numbers of confirmed cases of BSE reported in Dyfed and Wales by quarter year periods since 1989 are as follows:

Year	*Quarter*	*Dyfed*	*Wales*
1990	1	154	264
1990	2	130	233
1990	3	128	236
1990	4	171	350
1991	1	240	436
1991	2	261	462
1991	3	345	576
1991	4	411	761
1992	1	554	1,000
1992	2	443	768
1992	3	345	892
1992	4	518	1,013
1993	1	487	906

The figures for the first quarter of 1993 are necessarily incomplete as the basis of the statistics is confirmed cases by report in the appropriate period.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants receive income support in the London borough of Tower Hamlets; and what is the total number of people dependent upon income support within the London borough of Tower Hamlets.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief ececutive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Peter Shore, dated 17 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benfits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking how many claimants receive Income Support in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, and what is the total number of people dependent upon Income Support within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The complete range of information requested could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. This is because statistics relating to Income Support are not routinely collected to reflect either the number of recipients or their dependents by Borough area. Nor are statistics routinely collected reflecting the number of dependents of Income Support recipients.

However, I have appended information showing the number of recipients in the Benefits Agency districts which cover the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. I should emphasise that the boundaries of the offices concerned do not correspond with those of the Borough of Tower Hamlets.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

District office	*Income Support Live Load*
City East	32,469
Hackney and Islington	59,782
Total	92,251

Benefits (Bank Accounts)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to require pensioners to have their pensions paid via bank accounts; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House on 12 November 1992, our policy is to encourage pensioners and others who have a bank, building society or girobank account to receive their social security benefits directly into their accounts.

Recipients of the following benefits already have the choice of receiving their benefit by automated credit transfer (ACT):

Disability Living Allowance
Disability Working Allowance
Attendance Allowance
Pensions/Widows Benefit
Child Benefit
One Parent Benefit
Family Credit
War Pensions

In addition, the facility to pay benefit by ACT is being extended to invalidity benefit, sickness benefit and severe disablement allowance on a rolling implementation between May 1993 and January 1994; to unemployment benefit between May 1993 and October 1994; and to income support in October 1993.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to continue to allow pensions and benefits to be paid otherwise than directly into a bank or building society account; what representations he has received from those wishing to retain the payment of pensions and benefits through local post offices; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no intention of ceasing to use the network of post offices for payment of benefit and pensions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a variety of representations about the steps taken to increase awareness of the advantages of automated credit transfer, including a number of letters from members of the public.

Self-employed People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will review the position of the self-employed within the social security system;

(2) if he will bring forward legislation to extend entitlement to *(a)* the state earnings-related pension scheme and *(b)* industrial injuries scheme benefits to the self-employed.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to review the position of the self-employed within the social security system, or to amend the existing provisions of the state earnings-related pension scheme in relation to self-employed people. We shall be responding shortly to a report which the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council submitted to us in November last year on bringing the self-employed in construction and agriculture into the industrial injuries scheme.

Children in Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what financial assistance is available from his Department to parents who fall *(a)* within and *(b)* without income support entitlement to allow them to visit sick children in hospitals distant from their place of residence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The social fund can help people with reasonable travel expenses to visit someone who is ill. Payments are discretionary, but grants and budgeting loans for this purpose are often given high priority. As with previous schemes, help is focused on those least able to meet these costs.

Independent Living Fund

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he estimates would be brought into the independent living (1993) fund if the £500 upper cash limit were removed; and how much this would cost in real cash terms.

Mr. Scott: It would not be possible to provide such estimates.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Miss Widdecombe: Between 11 November 1987 and 31 March 1993 the Department has responded to 15,094 requests from data subjects for access to its computer files. In this same period, 44 complaints concerning suspected breaches of data protection principles have been received from data subjects via the Office of Data Protection Registrar. The principles involved and the dates on which the complaints were made are in the table.

Complaint type	*Number received*	*Dates received*
Principle 1	4	21 June 1990
		30 September 1991
		8 June 1992
		21 July 1992
Principle 3	4	7 March 1988
		11 July 1988
		13 February 1989
		19 March 1991
Principle 4	1	12 April 1992
Principle 5	13	11 November 1988
		31 July 1989
		1 March 1990
		5 March 1990
		24 July 1990
		18 March 1991
		14 May 1991
		20 July 1991
		22 July 1991
		29 July 1992
		30 September 1992
		27 October 1992
		3 March 1993

Complaint type	Number received	Dates received
Principle 7	17	3 February 1988
		7 March 1988
		3 June 1988
		15 June 1988
		22 August 1988
		26 October 1988
		26 April 1990
		24 October 1990
		20 December 1990
		18 December 1991
		13 May 1992
		9 June 1992
		6 July 1992
		8 December 1992
		25 January 1993
		9 March 1993
		19 March 1993
Principle 8	5	26 September 1990
		26 November 1991
		3 December 1991
		7 July 1992
		14 January 1993

In all cases the matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of the Data Protection Registrar and no changes to any of our computer systems have been made necessary in order to comply with the Data Protection Act.

Residential Homes

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had from the independent nursing and residential homes about the effects of rules which reduce pensions for pensioners who are hospitalised for longer than 42 days.

Miss Widdecombe: None.

Pension Schemes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the pension schemes approved by his Department which provide for the open enrolment of employees throughout a particular industry or service, irrespective of employer.

Miss Widdecombe: The following pension schemes, approved by the Occupational Pensions Board for the purposes of contracting out, are regarded as industry-wide schemes.

The Joint Industry Board Pension Scheme
Footwear Industry Pension Scheme
Engineering Industry Pension Scheme
Batjic Contracted-Out Money Purchase Scheme
Scotselect Pension Plan
Printing Industry Pension Scheme Option 88
Printing Industry Pension Scheme Option Two
Design Business Association Pension Scheme
IPA Portable Pension Plan
The Naid Members Retirement Benefit Scheme
National Association of Master Bakers Scheme
H & V Pensions

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of housing benefit paid *(a)* to council house tenants, *(b)* to housing association tenants, *(c)* to private rented tenants and *(d)* in total in (i) the Runcorn area of the Warrington, South constituency and (ii) the whole of the constituency in each year since 1986.

Mr. Burt: Information on expenditure on housing benefit is collected on a local authority basis. Information is available neither for the Runcorn area of the Warrington, South constituency nor for the Warrington, South constituency as a whole.

The available information for the borough councils of Warrington and Halton, which form part of the Warrington, South constituency, is in the table.

Housing benefit expenditure (£ thousands)[1]

Year	Rent rebate[2]	Rent allowance[3]	Rate rebate[4]	Total
	Local Authority			
Halton				
1986-87	4,040	1,043	4,640	9,723
1987-88	4,401	1,137	5,115	10,653
1988-89	4,541	1,232	4,167	9,940
1989-90	4,563	3,168	4,155	11,886
1990-91	5,037	6,920	—	11,957
1991-92	6,254	8,285	—	14,539
Warrington				
1986-87	5,362	1,184	4,472	11,018
1987-88	5,508	1,264	4,894	11,666
1988-89	5,670	1,329	4,199	11,198
1989-90	5,749	1,597	4,382	11,728
1990-91	6,334	2,104	—	8,438
1991-92	6,720	2,960	—	9,680

[1] The expenditure figures are from information supplied by local authorities and represent the authorities' claims for benefit paid and not subsidy received.

[2] Rent rebates are awarded to tenants in the council sector.

[3] Rent allowances are paid to tenants in the private sector and include those paid to tenants of Housing Associations: separate information in respect of Housing Associations is not available.

[4] From 1986-87 to 1989-90 inclusive, Housing Benefit included rate rebates. As rate rebates were paid to qualifying council and private tenants, in addition to owner occupiers, total rate rebate expenditure has been included in the table. It is not possible to separate out that part of the rate rebate expenditure which was received by tenants.

Income Support

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support applications in each month in 1990-91 and 1991-92, were not granted on the grounds that a partner/wife was employed for 16 or more hours per week in *(a)* the United Kingdom as a whole, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* England, *(d)* Wales and *(e)* Northern Ireland; and if he will also publish comparable figures for 1986-87 with a cut-off point of 24 hours per week.

Mr. Burt: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Matters relating to Northern Ireland are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

15. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for "Options for Change" of the situation in Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government's plans for force restructuring recognise that new peacetime commitments, including United Nations operations, could arise. We keep force structures under review and, while we will make adjustments if necessary, we have no current plans to do so.

24. **Mr. Channon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of United Kingdom forces in Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The role of British forces deployed to the former Yugoslavia in support of the United Nations operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina is to assist the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees with the passage of humanitarian aid and refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross with the exchange of detainees. Other tasks, such as the evacuation of the sick and wounded, in the spirit of United Nations Security Council resolutions 770 and 776 are also carried out as requested and as circumstances permit. So far 536 convoys escorted by British troops have delivered 36,265 tonnes of humanitarian aid. In addition 7,137 tonnes of aid have been flown into Sarajevo by the RAF.

21. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution Britain is making to policing the no-fly zone in Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom is taking part in the NATO operation to monitor and enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia in accordance with the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 816. We have provided eight Tornado F3 aircraft, with their air-to-air refuelling support to the multinational force. United Kingdom E3-Ds, as part of the NATO airborne early warning force, continue to monitor the no-fly zone.

26. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military contribution Britain is making to promote peace in Bosnia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answers I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon).

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

16. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a further statement on the NATO rapid reaction corps.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The headquarters of the Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps was established on 2 October 1992 and full operational capability will be achieved by 1995.

United Nations Operations

17. **Ms Estelle Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that there are sufficient British contributions to future United Nations operations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our plans for current and future force levels take account of the requirement to respond to requests from the United Nations for military contributions to peacekeeping operations. We already provide over 3,500 troops for United Nations operations worldwide, making us the second largest troop contributor.

Helicopters

18. **Sir Roger Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy with regard to the joint use of helicopters and other facilities for defence and civilian purposes including air ambulance and police work.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service helicopters and associated facilities are made available for non-military purposes under arrangements with other Government Departments and subject to operational commitments. A typical example is the provision of civilian search and rescue.

Expenditure

19. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of how recent representations on defence expenditure differ from those received by his Department during the mid-1980s.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have been major changes in the strategic environment since the mid-1980s. These changes have been reflected in our defence expenditure plans and, of course, in the representations received on them.

Service Housing

20. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning his policy on service housing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department has received a number of representations recently from hon. Members, local authorities, and housing associations on service housing policy.

Shipbuildings

22. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has provided to the shipbuilding industry concerning the timing of future orders.

Mr. Aitken: My Department maintains regular contacts with the shipbuilding industry. One of our main aims is to keep the industry as well informed as possible about future requirements, including timing.

Merlin Programme

23. **Mr. Mark Robinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made on the Merlin programme.

Mr. Aitken: Good progress is being made on our order for 44 of the Merlin anti-submarine warfare variant of the EH101 for the Royal Navy. The collaborative development with Italy of the basic EH101 aircraft is also progressing well, and the flight test programme is some two thirds complete.

Somalia

25. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom is to provide military forces in support of Unosom II in Somalia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no plans to do so.

Development Areas

27. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service and civilian personnel were based at his Department's establishments located in areas designated by the Department of Trade and Industry as development areas in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Manpower statistics are not collected for the development areas and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Belize

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the Royal Air Force undertook training in low flying in Belize in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF aircraft are stationed in Belize for operational rather than training purposes. From time to time these aircraft will fly low-level training sorties, but only to qualify the aircrew stationed in theatre for operational duties. It is not our practice to comment on operational details.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will hold urgent talks with the Government of Belize about the maintenance of order on their border with Guatemala in the event of withdrawal of British troops.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 13 May at column *561*. The Government of Belize were consulted closely about the changes announced. These consultations included discussion on the question of the future security of the border between Belize and Guatemala.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation he is undertaking with Commonwealth countries about the security of Belize in the light of "Options for Change."

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The changes announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 13 May, at column 561, are in response to the greatly improved relations between Belize and Guatemala, and not "Options for Change". We have made clear to the Government of Belize that we are prepared to play a full part in any consultations that they may request on Belize's future security. It is for them to decide which countries they wish to involve in any such discussions.

Low Flying

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he received from hon. Members in the last five years about low flying by the RAF in their constituencies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table:

Year	*Number*
1988	595
1989	763
1990	697
1991	353
1992	323
1993	[1]85
TOTAL	2,816

[1]Up to 30 April 1993.

Jungle Training

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many courses in jungle training were undertaken by the British Army in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Nine in each year.

Yugoslavia

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* shortest and *(b)* longest time served in the former Yugoslavia by members of Her Majesty's armed forces currently engaged there.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The standard length of tour for British armed forces personnel serving in the former Yugoslavia is six months. To date the longest tour, for a few key personnel, has been 6·5 months and the shortest, for specialist personnel deployed for a specific task, two days.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to date of the British presence in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is assessed that the additional cost of the United Kingdom presence in the former Yugoslavia amounts to date to some £78,000,000.

Rosyth Minesweeper Flotilla

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to move the minesweeper flotilla stationed at Rosyth to Greenock harbour; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of research and development support to Rolls-Royce plc from his Department in the last financial year; under what programmes the support was provided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: In 1992-93, payments made by my Department to Rolls-Royce plc and its subsidiary companies for research and development totalled £42,869,505, through some 175 active contracts. Details of these are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The subjects of the nine contracts placed during the year were research into: cables, electrical connectors and associated items for naval use; high pressure gas cylinders for naval use; future ship propulsion systems; and aero engine future technology.

Swan Hunter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money is owed by his Department to Swan Hunter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: My Department does not accept that it owes the company any money. Payments on MOD contracts are fully up to date in accordance with the terms of those contracts.

Negotiations are in progress with the receiver over a claim against my Department by the company in respect of the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel—AOR-02. The maximum amount currently justifiable has already been paid to the company.

Negotiations on the completion of the three type 23 frigates currently under construction at the yard also continue. Progress payments are being made in accordance with the terms of the contracts. Arrangements are being made for one such payment to be made today.

HEALTH

Clinical Grading Appeals

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of registered clinical grading appeals for nurses and midwives which remains outstanding at *(a)* regional and *(b)* national levels.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of outstanding regrading appeals by nurses in the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: The total outstanding clinical grading appeals at 30 April was 20,440; of these there were 15,020 outstanding at regional level, and 2,006 at national level, in England.

Sight Tests

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many eye examinations were carried out in England in each year since 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: The numbers of national health service sight tests paid for in each financial year in England are shown in the table. The number of private sight tests carried out since the introduction of sight test charges is not available.

Year		Millions
1984-85		9·89
1985-86		10·25
1986-87		10·62
1987-88		11·70
1988-89		12·49
1989-90	Old scheme	1·63
	New scheme[1]	3·65
1990-91		4·15
1991-92		4·98

[1] From 1 April 1989 NHS sight tests were restricted to certain groups in the population. The sight tests paid for in 1989-90 include some conducted prior to 1 April 1989 (old scheme) when sight tests were universally available. The remainder paid for in 1989-90 do not represent a full year under the new system, because of the delay in payments. The figure for 1989-90 is not, therefore directly comparable with that for 1990-91.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what investigations her Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if she will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by her Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about her Department since April 1989; and how many of them have been accepted.

Mr. Sackville: Reports by the Health Select Committee and the Government's responses to these reports are recorded for each parliamentary Session, in the sessional information digests, compiled by the Public Information Office, copies of which are available in the Library.

Children in Care

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the number of children of each sex *(a)* in local authority care, *(b)* fostered and *(c)* adopted for each year since 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The information is shown in the table.

Numbers of children in the care of and fostered by local authorities and numbers of adoption orders made 1979 to 1991

	Children in care, England at 31 March				Adoption orders made[1] in England and Wales	
	Children in care[2]		Fostered[3]			
Year	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1979	56,459	38,629	17,609	16,587	5,593	5,277
1980	56,144	39,153	18,187	17,054	5,428	5,181
1981	54,459	37,811	18,659	17,090	4,799	4,485
1982	52,083	36,580	19,302	17,574	5,305	4,935
1983	48,072	34,093	19,203	17,321	4,640	4,389
1984	43,513	31,332	19,032	17,059	4,437	4,211
1985	39,985	29,565	18,421	16,589	3,856	3,587
1986	38,139	29,187	18,385	16,731	4,042	3,634
1987	36,518	29,250	18,137	16,903	3,545	3,505
1988	35,259	29,093	18,108	16,818	3,675	3,513

Year	Children in care, England at 31 March: Children in care[2] Male	Children in care[2] Female	Fostered[3] Male	Fostered[3] Female	Adoption orders made[1] in England and Wales: Male	Female
1989	33,737	28,411	17,556	16,604	3,480	3,352
1990	32,506	28,026	17,675	16,873	3,362	3,171
1991	31,955	27,879	17,859	16,907	3,372	3,799
[4]1992	55,000		32,100		—	

[1] *Source:* OPCS publication "Marriage and Divorce Statistics, series FM2, October 19xx". Adoption order made in England and Wales.
[2] *Source:* "Children in care of local authorities year ending 31 March 19xx, England".
[3] The number of children in local authority care in foster placements at 31 March.
[4] Figures for 1992 refer to estimation of the total number of children looked after by local authorities. Breakdown by sex is not yet available.

Dementia

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are currently produced by her Department for general practitioners and other community-based professionals concerning the identification of dementia and the availability and effectiveness of dementia-related services.

Mr. Yeo: The Department has not produced guidelines.

Skin Cancer

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what quantified estimates have been produced by her Department on the impact of the depletion of the ozone layer upon future numbers of skin cancer cases in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 19 October 1992 at column *80*.

Medical Negligence

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) of 15 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *184*, when the cost to the NHS of medical negligence claims in 1991-92 will be made available; and what is the reason for their earlier non-availability.

Mr. Sackville: The cost of claims settled during 1991-92 is estimated at around £58 million. This information had not been received from health authorities when my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) asked his question in December 1992.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to collect and collate details of NHS medical negligence claims to identify patterns and trends to enable advice to be given to health authorities, NHS trusts and general practitioners.

Mr. Sackville: We require health authorities and national health service trusts to provide annual returns of the costs of claims settled each financial year. A working group with representatives of the Department and the NHS is to be set up to look at the handling of medical negligence claims in the NHS, and will consider the adequacy of information collected.

Play Groups

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated financial value of the contribution provided by her Department in England to pre-school play groups in respect of each pupil per season for a year.

Mr. Yeo: The Department does not make grants directly to individual playgroups.

Total grant aid from central Government to the Pre-school Playgroups Association (PPA) in 1993-94 is over £1·5 million, of which £570,000 is given by the Department towards PPA's headquarters costs and implementation of a major reorganisation. The PPA also takes part in the Department's small grants scheme, in which small capital grants are dispersed to playgroups.

Broadgreen Hospital

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the text of the copy letter sent to her by the leaders of Liverpool and Knowsley councils, dated 28 April, concerning the future of Broadgreen hospital accident and emergency unit, a copy of her response, the final number of objections received to this proposal and an estimate of when she will publish her conclusions.

Mr. Sackville: Liverpool health authority, at a meeting on 12 May, accepted a series of proposals for the future development of national health services in the city, including the closure of Broadgreen hospital's accident and emergency department. The authority's decision may have to be considered by Mersey regional health authority and referred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a decision if the local community health councils object. The proposals were the subject of full public consultation, during which time all views expressed were passed to Liverpool health authority to be taken into account before a final decision was reached. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. D. H. Tod, chairman of Liverpool health authority, for details.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the budget for the Prescription Pricing Authority in each year since August 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

PPA gross expenditure

£'000s

Financial year	Revenue	Capital
1988-89	17,382	1,965
1989-90	19,792	1,588
1990-91	25,268	12,505
1991-92	28,043	1,278
1992-93	[1]31,644	[1]6,882

[1] Provisional outturn.

Childhood Cancer

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice she has received from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment on the recently published study into the relationship between work in the nuclear industry and the incidence of childhood cancer in west Berkshire and north Hampshire.

Mr. Sackville: The committee's broad conclusion was to agree with the authors of the study that parental employment in the nuclear industry could not account for the excess incidence of childhood leukaemia observed in the area.

The full text of the advice is as follows.

Statement from COMARE regarding the Aldermaston and Burghfield Case-control Report

1. The COMARE third report "On the incidence of Childhood Cancer in the West Berkshire and North Hampshire area, in which are situated the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston and the Royal Ordnance Factory, Burghfield", concluded that:

> "there is a small but statistically significant increase in registration rates of childhood leukaemia in the age group 0-14 over the period 1972-85, in the areas within 10km of AWRE Aldermaston and ROF Burghfield, compared with both the national rates, and the regional rates of Oxford and Wessex."

To investigate whether this increased childhood leukaemia incidence was related to parents' employment in the nuclear industry, COMARE recommended that a case-control study be undertaken. Government accepted the recommendation and the Department of Health provided funding for the work to be undertaken by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund Epidemiology Unit. The results of this "Case control study of leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma among children aged 0-4 years living in West Berkshire and North Hampshire Health Districts" have now been published (British Medical Journal 1993 Vol. 306 pages 615-621) and considered by COMARE.

2. The subjects were 54 children aged 0-4 years who had leukaemia or non-Hodgkins lymphoma diagnosed during 1972-89 who were born in the study area and were resident there when the cancer was diagnosed. They were compared with six controls selected for each case. Five of the fifty four cases and fourteen out of the 324 controls had fathers or mothers or both who had been employed by the nuclear industry, a difference which was not significant. The main finding of the study was that three fathers of cases and two fathers of controls (and no mothers of either) had undertaken work which required radiation monitoring at some time (but in no instance in the 4 years immediately preceding) the conception of the child.

3. The study concluded that:

> "These results suggest that the children of fathers who had been monitored for exposure to external penetrating ionising radiation in the nuclear industry may be at increased risk of developing leukaemia before their fifth birthday. The finding is based on small numbers and could be due to chance.
>
> If the relationship is real the mechanisms are far from clear, except that the effect is unlikely to be due to external radiation; the possibility that it could be due to internal contamination by radioactive substances or some other exposure at work should be pursued. The above average rates of leukaemia in the study area cannot be accounted for by these findings."

4. COMARE welcomed the study. It was agreed that the study design, which had been commissioned to determine whether there was an association between childhood cancer and parental employment in the nuclear establishments of the study area, adequately addressed its aims in terms of subject, disease and control selection and methods of data collection and analysis. The stated conclusions were accepted by the Committee.

5. The Committee noted that whereas their third report had found 53 cases of childhood leukaemia in the age group 0-4 years in the study area when only 34 would have been expected on the basis of national rates, the current study had identified only 5 cases that could have been at any possible risk because a parent had worked in the nuclear industry. The Committee, after taking into account the different time periods considered by COMARE's third report and the current study, therefore agreed with the authors that employment in the nuclear industry of the parents of cases could not account for the excess incidence of childhood leukaemia observed in the area.

6. COMARE noted the authors statement "our results can be interpreted as supporting Gardner and colleagues' finding" that the children of men who had been exposed to external penetrating ionising radiation before their child was conceived were at an increased risk of leukaemia. The Committee did not feel that conclusions regarding pre- and post-contraception exposure could be drawn from this study in view of the very small number of families affected. Furthermore it was agreed that the study provided no new evidence to distinguish between the various hypotheses previously suggested regarding causative agents or chance effects in relation to childhood cancer incidence in the vicinity of certain nuclear installations.

7. COMARE noted that further studies of the occupational histories of the parents are currently being undertaken. The Committee considered that the further work proposed in the conclusion of the study was already being conducted in two studies now in progress. The first of these is the Nuclear Industries Family Study being undertaken by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and jointly funded by the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive. The second study, involving the National Radiological Protection Board and the Department of Public Health and Epidemiology at Birmingham University, will analyse the relationship between records of the National Register of Radiation Workers and those of the Childhood Cancer Registry Group.

"Choosing with Care"

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the Government's progress with implementation of the Warner report "Choosing with Care".

Mr. Yeo: I will be announcing the Government's further response to the Warner report "Choosing with Care" at the Association of Directors of Social Services seminar on 19 May. When the report was published on 7 December 1992, local authorities were asked to take urgent action to implement the recommendations aimed at improving personnel practices and procedures, and the arrangements for the supervision and appraisal of staff. Reports asked for by Easter indicated that good progress is being made.

Tomorrow I shall be responding in more detail to the remaining recommendations of the Warner report. This will cover the following areas: training, vetting and police checks; a campaign to raise public awareness of residential child care; a code of employment practice; a code of practice on national standards and a modified proposal for a development action group.

I will be placing a copy of that response in the Library tomorrow morning, 19 May, at 11 am.

In addition, the Department will also be discussing with the local authority associations a phased programme of action for implementation by local authorities of the remaining recommendations addressed to employers. This is to be set in train by July this year.

Public Health Guidance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the findings of the review undertaken by Mr. Michael Abrams for the public health guidance to the national health service; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The committee chaired by Dr. Michael Abrams aims to complete its work within the next few months. Decisions on further action will be taken at that time.

NHS Management Executive

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to turn the NHS management executive into a next steps agency; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: We have no such plans. I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 12 May at columns *483-84*, which sets out the terms of reference of the national health service management functions and manpower review.

The conclusions of this review will be relevant to the future organisation of the NHS management executive.

Mineral Hydrocarbons

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given by the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment to the use of mineral hydrocarbons in food packaging, baking and related applications; what account the committee has taken of studies reported by the British Biological Research Association on the use of hydrocarbon oils and waxes; what further studies are recommended; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) advised in 1988 that mineral hydrocarbons should no longer be permitted in food because of evidence from laboratory animal experiments that they could accumulate in certain organs and cause damage to these organs.

It is now reviewing its advice following subsequent receipt of the toxicity studies carried out by the British Industrial Biological Research Association (BIBRA) on mineral hydrocarbon oils and waxes. Their advice, and any recommendations for further research studies, will be considered by Ministers together with advice on this subject from the Food Advisory Committee.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of finished consultant episodes in acute, geriatric and maternity specialties; how many were *(a)* elective admissions, *(b)* emergency admissions, *(c)* maternity admissions, *(d)* well babies born in hospital, *(e)* transfers from other departments in the same hospital and *(f)* transfers from another hospital, in each financial year since 1988-89.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 April 1993]:* Figures from the hospital episode system (HES) for 1989-90 have recently been published. More detailed analysis by method of admission showing the percentage distribution of episodes is shown in the table. Comparable data for 1988-89 and for 1990-91 and subsequent years is not yet available.

Method of admission 1989-90

Specialty	*Specialty groups* Acute	Maternity	Geriatric[3]
Number (000's)	6,941	977	449
Method of admission:	[3]Per cent.	[3]Per cent.	[3]Per cent.
Elective	46	[1]—	13
Emergency	37	[1]—	71
Maternity	3	[1]—	0
Well babies	8	[1]—	0
Transfers from other district	1	[1]—	1
Transfers within the district[2]	5	[1]—	16

[1] The distribution of admissions in the maternity sector are not shown since the deficiency of maternity records in HES makes estimates liable to large errors.

[2] Transfers within districts include transfers from departments in the same hospital.

[3] Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics 1989-90.

Consultant Episodes

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the total number of finished consultant episodes in acute, geriatric and maternity specialties; how many finished with *(a)* discharge to the patient's usual place of residence, *(b)* discharge to another domestic address, *(c)* transfer to another department in the same hospital, *(d)* transfer to another hospital, *(e)* death or *(f)* discharge to a non-domestic address outside the NHS, for each financial year since 1988-89.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 23 April 1993]:* Figures from the hospital episode system (HES) for 1989-90 are to be published shortly. These will show total finished consultant episodes—ordinary admissions plus day cases—in that year by specialty group. The table shows, for each specialty group, the percentage distribution among valid discharge destination codes. Comparable data for 1988-89 and for 1990-91 and subsequent years are not yet available.

Admissions in 1989-90

Specialty	*Specialty groups* Acute	Maternity	Geriatric
Number (000's)	6,491	977	449
Discharged to:	Per cent.	Per cent.	Per cent.
Usual residence	91	96	62
Other domestic	1	0	2
Other department, same hospital	4	3	12
Other hospital	1	1	1
Death	3	0	19
Non-domestic outside NHS	1	0	4

Source: Hospital Episode System 1989-90.

Migraine

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of the relative costs of drugs used to treat migraine.

Dr. Mawhinney: None. Section 4.7.4 of the "British National Formulary" lists the costs of all preparations used in the treatment of migraine. This publication is issued free to all doctors within the national health service.

Health Promotion Staff

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health promotion staff were employed by each English and Welsh health authority in 1992-93 and what was the figure for 1982-83.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* The latest information available will be placed in the Library. The figures relate only to those health promotion staff falling within administrative and clerical grades—there is no information available centrally on health promotion staff from other staff groups. Health promotion work is also undertaken by most national health service personnel at a local level, for example, general practitioners, dieticians, health visitors, and by non-NHS organisations including local authorities. In addition to health promotion staff employed in health authorities, staff are also employed in NHS trusts and other provider units.

Health promotion matters in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 19 May 1993

PRIME MINISTER

Biodiversity

Ms Short: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Departments have been and continue to be involved in discussions over the negotiation, ratification and implementation of the convention on biological diversity.

The Prime Minister: The Government Departments mainly involved include the Department of the Environment, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—including the Overseas Development Administration—Her Majesty's Treasury, the Northern Ireland Office, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Law Officers' Department, the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Decisions on these matters are taken collectively.

Economic Recovery

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister from what month or quarter he estimates the economic recovery began; and if he will set out the evidence from output and trade statistics underlying his estimate.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* It is always difficult to pinpoint economic turning points accurately until some time after they have occurred. But total output has been rising since last summer, and there have been encouraging signs—in figures for gross domestic product, manufacturing output, retail sales and exports—that recovery is under way across a broad front.

TRANSPORT

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of jobs that will be created by the Birmingham northern relief road during construction in toll operation and in motorway service areas.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The concessionaire, Midland Expressway Ltd., estimates that the road will generate well over 500 on-site jobs during each year of construction; 220 to 270 full-time jobs when the road is operating at capacity; and the equivalent of a further 200 to 250 full-time jobs when the motorway service area opens.

Emissions

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many copies of his Department's joint report with the Department of the Environment on reducing transport emissions through planning, published this year, have been published; at what cost; and to whom it has been distributed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The report for this research, "Reducing Transport Emissions through Planning", was published on 20 April by HMSO, price £12 (ISBN 0-11-752785-8). HMSO printed 1,300 copies. The Departments of the Environment and of Transport have bought copies for their own use and a limited number of complimentary copies have been sent to key bodies, such as the local authority associations. Members of the public can buy the report directly from HMSO, through their agents or through good booksellers.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has recently received regarding the hazards posed by the transport of plutonium.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: During this year, my Department has received a variety of letters from hon. Members and others, together with parliamentary questions from both Houses, about the transport of plutonium.

M3

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the status of the M3 extension through Twyford Down, and the planned timetable; if the extension is currently on schedule; and if contracts include penalty clauses for a time delay.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The main works for the construction of the Bar End to Compton section of the M3 have been in progress since October 1992 and are due for completion in autumn 1994. A three-week extension of time has been granted to the contractor in respect of difficulties with the appointment of a steel work subcontractor for the Shawford railway bridge. The contract includes the normal provision for liquidated damages if the works are completed later than the contract completion date.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect his recent circular 2/93 on transport policies and programme submissions has on *(a)* the threshold for highway schemes to qualify for TSG, *(b)* from minor schemes costing under £2 million and *(c)* from road safety schemes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The circular explains that from 1994-95 the threshold for construction and improvement schemes to be accepted for TSG will be £2 million. Schemes costing under £2 million, including road safety measures, will be supported with credit approvals only.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mediation Services

Mr. Michael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consideration he has given to the potential for cost-saving advantages of funding more community mediation services as an alternative to litigation or, when the offence has arisen from an interpersonal dispute, to prosecution.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor is in favour of disputants resorting to mediation or other private

dispute resolution processes where they do not need the compulsion, certainty or finality that only the court can provide. We are currently reviewing the ways in which the tangible benefits of alternative dispute resolution might be harnessed to contribute to our programme of reducing delay, cost and complexity in civil litigation.

The potential of schemes involving mediation between offenders and victims to contribute to the process of cautioning as an alternative to prosecution is being considered by the Home Office.

Cyprus

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement outlining the basis on which the Lord Chancellor visited northern Cyprus; and whom he met.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor visited Cyprus from 1 to 8 May where he was attending the 10th Commonwealth law conference and on 6 May attended a function at the British high commission in northern Nicosia to which the high commissioner had invited lawyers from northern Cyprus. While in northern Cyprus, the Lord Chancellor had an opportunity to speak to Mr. Denktash, leader of the Turkish Cypriots, and to put to him the British Government's serious concern about the arrival of Mr. Asil Nadir in northern Cyprus.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

British Antarctic Survey

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to complete the restructuring of the British Antarctic Survey; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Jackson: As part of the allocations of the science budget announced on 10 February, some £4 million over three years up to 1995-96 has been allocated to the Natural Environment Research Council towards the completion of the restructuring of the British Antarctic Survey's facilities in Antarctica. This will increase the opportunities for visiting scientists from our higher education institutions and will facilitate international collaboration.

Over the past decade, the survey has undertaken a major capital replacement programme. It has rebuilt the Halley station as a centre for geospace and atmospheric research, including ozone destruction. It has replaced one of its two ships by a purpose-built dual research and logistics vessel, the RRS James Clark Ross, and it has greatly enhanced the air facilities at its Rothera station by the construction of a hard airstrip, the purchase of two further Twin Otters and a longer range DHC7 aircraft, which will improve access at the start of the Antarctic season.

It will now consolidate its marine biology work from the RRS James Clark Ross and at Rothera, where new facilities will be built for biological research. Automated data collection systems will be developed and introduced to Faraday, which will remain as an unmanned station from 1995-96, and to the Signy station, where the present outdated accommodation will be replaced with modern facilities to support biological research during the austral summer.

A proportion of the funds will also be used to clean up abandoned former British bases in Antarctica, a requirement under the 1991 environmental protocol to the Antarctic treaty.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Witness Protection

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce a witness protection scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mates: Arrangements for the safety and protection of Crown witnesses, in selected cases, are operational matters for the Chief Constable of the RUC. The RUC has had a witness protection scheme since the early 1980s.

Playgroups

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the amount of financial support granted by *(a)* each education and library board and *(b)* each health and social services board in Northern Ireland to pre-school playgroups in their respective areas; and what is the value of this funding expressed as an amount per pupil enrolled per session provided for a year.

Mr. Hanley: Education and library boards do not provide financial support for pre-school playgroups. In 1991-92, the latest financial year for which figures are available, the amount of grant aid provided by each health and social services board to registered playgroups in their respective areas was as follows:

Board	*Amount of grant* £
Northern	64,387
Southern	209,177
Eastern	822,140
Western	142,488
TOTAL	1,238,192

It is not possible to express the value of this funding as an amount per child enrolled.

Medical Inquiries

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many NHS hospital doctors and consultants are currently under suspension pending inquiries and disciplinary action.

Mr. Hanley: This information is not held centrally.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about his Department since April 1989; and how many of them have been accepted.

Mr. Mates: I refer the hon. Member to the "Sessional Information Digest", a copy of which is held in the Library.

School Tests

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on future testing and assessment of pupils in Northern Ireland schools.

Mr. Hanley: The Northern Ireland Schools Examination and Assessment Council (NISEAC) is currently undertaking an evaluation of the pilot key stage 2 and key stage 3 assessments which took place recently. I have asked the council to let me have, by the end of May, preliminary advice on the main changes which will need to be made to the assessment arrangements next year. I have already given a firm commitment to respond to the findings of the evaluation and to make whatever changes I consider are necessary to make the arrangements workable and manageable. An announcement about the arrangements for next year will be made before the end of June.

Jubilee Maternity Hospital

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what discussions he has had on the plans for the closure of the Jubilee maternity hospital with *(a)* the Royal College of Midwives, *(b)* Belfast city council, *(c)* the National Childbirth Trust, *(d)* the Christian Churches in Northern Ireland, *(e)* the medical, nursing and ancillary staff of the hospital, *(f)* local Members of Parliament, *(g)* pregnant mothers and *(h)* representatives of the welfare organisations serving police and military personnel;

(2) what recent meetings he has held with representatives of the Jubilee Action Group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: None at this time. The Eastern health and social services board, in whose area the Jubilee maternity hospital is located, is currently engaged in the process of determining its strategy for acute services within the framework set in the Department of Health and Social Services' regional strategy. That process has involved the board in widespread consultation on its "Statement of Intent for general (Acute) Hospital Services within the Eastern Board Area". The consultation period ended on 14 May 1993 and the board, having regard to the comment and representations made during the consultative exercise, is expected to reach its decisions by September 1993. These decisions will, of course, be subject to ministerial endorsement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many babies are currently delivered annually in the Jubilee maternity hospital; and what percentage of all hospital deliveries in Northen Ireland is represented by this figure.

Mr. Hanley: Of the 25,960 hospital deliveries in Northern Ireland in 1991-92—including live and still births—2,869 were at the Jubilee maternity hospital, representing 11 per cent. of the total.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration was given to issues of *(a)* security of access and *(b)* public transport accessibility by the Eastern health board in assessing the future of the Jubilee maternity hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The board has recently concluded a consultation process on its plans for acute hospital services and has not yet completed its deliberations. It will be some time before it is in a position to submit its conclusions to my noble Friend the Earl of Arran for endorsement.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many letters he has so far received concerning the future of the Jubliee maternity hospital; and how many of those letters supported *(a)* retention and *(b)* closure of this facility.

Mr. Hanley: My right hon. and learned Friend has so far received 138 letters concerning the future of the Jubilee maternity hospital, most of which supported the retention of the hospital.

Eastern Health Board

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the Eastern health board.

Mr. Hanley: The current members of the Eastern health and social services board are as follows:

Chairman
N. G. D. Ferguson

Non-Executive Members
J. C. Morton
D. J. McGuinness
Mrs. G. Loughran
Mrs. J. Ferguson
Prof. R. W. Stout
P. J. McLachlan

Executive Members
P. Kinder—Chief Executive
Miss A. Paisley—Director of Finance
Ms A. Lynch—Director of Planning
E. McCullough—Director of Operations
B. Moore—Director of Social Services.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who is responsible for the provision and maintenance of radio hearing aids for *(a)* pre-school children, *(b)* children at school and *(c)* students in further and higher education in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The education and library boards.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect since 13 January 1987 in terms of the retail prices index of (i) privatisation, (ii) intervention by Government to raise the rate of return on sales and capital in the public sector and (iii) increases in indirect taxation excluding rates etc., and (iv) reduction of subsidies.

Mr. Nelson: It is not possible properly to isolate such effects.

Foreign Holidays

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely change in the price of foreign holidays in 1993 and 1994 as

a result of the fall in nominal exchange rates since September 1992; and if he will exclude such changes from the retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: An assessment of the effects of depreciation on all prices was built into my right hon. Friend's Budget forecast for underlying inflation. Changes in the price of foreign holidays have been included in the retail prices index from January this year, as recommended by the RPI Advisory Committee.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1970 and this year to date *(a)* the nominal and real rate of interest and *(b)* the change in the nominal and real rate of exchange based on relative unit values for manufactures based on the second half of 1973 = 100.

Mr. Nelson: Nominal rates of interest are published in the Central Statistical Office's "Economic Trends", table 41. There is no unique definition of real interest rates. For example, calculations based on yields on index-linked gilts are published montly in CSO's "Financial Statistics", table 13.4; alternative measures of real interest rates may be derived from nominal interest rates and the various price indices published in, for example, "Economic Trends". The sterling—nominal—exchange rate index is published in "Financial Statistics", table 13.1. Finally, calculations of United Kingdom relative manufacturers' exports prices, based on unit value indices, are published in "Economic Trends", table 25.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether domestic holidays are included under other recreations in the retail price index in table 18.2 of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics"; and if he will publish separate figures for the increase in the price of domestic holidays to enable a comparison to be drawn with the newly published figures for foreign holidays.

Mr. Nelson: At present, no index measuring price changes in domestic holidays is compiled. However, the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee has recommended—Cm 2142, paragraph 122—that such an index, be developed as soon as practicable.

Illegal Weapons

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many illegal weapons purchased through mail order catalogues have been seized by HM Customs and Excise in each of the last 10 years.

Sir John Cope: Customs records of total seizures do not specify those which relate to items purchased through mail order catalogues.

European Parliament Pensions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provision is being made for the payment of improved death gratuities and dependants' benefits to beneficiaries under the European Parliament (United Kingdom Representatives) Pension Scheme.

Mr. Portillo: Parliamentary approval will be sought later this year in an order under the European Parliament (Pay and Pensions) Act 1979 to changes to the European Parliament (United Kingdom Representatives) Pension Scheme. These changes will bring the scheme's provisions for death gratuities and dependants' benefits into line with those introduced for the parliamentary contributory pension fund by the Parliamentary Pensions (Amendment) Regulations 1991. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £1,100 will be met from repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund. Once the order has been approved, the Contingencies Fund will be repaid upon approval of the Contingencies Fund repayment vote in 1994-95.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made by Her Majesty's Government to the Croat Government following the attack by Croat forces on UN-protected Serbian positions in Krajina in January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on 9 February, *Official Report*, column *545*.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the President of Croatia in relation to reports of forcible detention of Muslim civilians by Croat forces near Mostar.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), on 17 May, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's ambassador to Zagreb has been instructed to draw to the attention of the President of Croatia the establishment of a war crimes tribunal; and if Her Majesty's Government will make similar representations to the leader of the Bosnian Croats, Mr. Mate Boban.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No such instructions have been given. We welcome the UN Secretary-General's draft for the statute of such an international tribunal.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requirements will be imposed on the *(a)* Serbian, *(b)* Montenegrin and *(c)* Yugoslav Governments as a requirement for the removal of economic sanctions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The sanctions imposed under United Nations Security Council resolutions 757, 30 May 1992; 787, 16 November 1992; and 820, 17 April 1993, apply to Serbia and Montenegro which together constitute the so-called "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia".

The measures adopted in these resolutions will apply until the UN Security Council decides that the authorities in Serbia and Montenegro have taken effective measures to fulfil the requirements laid down in UNSCR 752, which was adopted on 15 May 1992.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had

with the German Foreign Minister, Herr Klaus Kinkel, about Croatian aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Croat/Muslim clashes in central Bosnia were discussed at the meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 10 May. All partners expressed their concern over the renewed fighting between Bosnian Croats and Muslims in Mostar and agreed that the EC presidency should send a firm protest to President Tudjman of Croatia. Mr. Kinkel undertook to reinforce this message when he met President Tudjman on 14 May.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now urge his counterparts at the United Nations to consider a full range of economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Republic of Croatia in the event that Croat aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina continues.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The EC presidency sent a message to President Tudjman on 12 May making clear that unless Croatia used all its influence to stop the fighting between Croats and Muslims in central Bosnia, stronger measures would be considered.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals for military intervention in the former Yugoslavia have been discussed with the United States State Department since 8 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are in regular contact with the United States Government on developments within the former Yugoslavia. We are agreed that the first objective must be to induce the parties to accept a lasting ceasefire and a negotiated settlement. We have taken a number of measures in the United Nations to maximise pressure on the parties, without excluding the possibility of stronger measures. No decision has been taken on the steps which might be taken if the Serbs continue to reject the will of the international community.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Croatian Government regarding the disruption of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees effort following Muslim-Croat fighting around the British Army base at Vitez.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham, to the hon. Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) on 17 May, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions took place at the last meeting of EC Foreign Ministers of the official visit to the Republic of Croatia on 14 May by the German Foreign Minister, Herr Klaus Kinkel.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Mr. Kinkel made it clear at the meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 10 May that he would use his visit to Zagreb to press President Tudjman to use his influence to end the fighting between Croats and Muslims in Mostar and to reinforce the message to be sent by the EC presidency on this.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government's representative to the United Nations Security Council will propose the establishment of safe havens in areas populated by the indigenous Serb community in the Republic of Croatia, following Croat Army attacks against these areas in January.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There have been four United Nations protected areas (UNPAs) in Croatia since February 1992. There are no plans to designate safe areas in Croatia like those established in Bosnia by United Nations Security Council resolution 824. The co-chairmen of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia have brokered negotiations to establish a ceasefire following the Croatian army attacks in January, but the Krajina Serbs have so far failed to ratify the resulting agreement.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Croatian President following reports by the EC special envoy Jose Maria Mendiluce on the forecast of future numbers of Muslims who would be forced to move as a result of Croatian aggression; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham, on 17 May, *Official Report*, column *43*. We have made no specific representations on the comments by UNHCR special representative Mr. Mendiluce.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate has been made of the numbers of regular Croatian troops currently within the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Although there have been numerous reports of regular Croatian troops in Bosnia, we have no specific information on their numbers.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Croatia to dismantle the self-appointed Croat state of Herceg-Bosnia in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The London conference made it clear in its statement of principles that we upheld the fundamental obligation to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region. The Vance-Owen peace plan—which the Croats have accepted—insists that Croat areas in Bosnia should remain part of the sovereign Bosnian state. We reflect this in all our contacts with the Croatian Government.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the illegal supply of arms to the Bosnian Croats from the Republic of Croatia; and if he will put forward proposals to seal the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We are aware of numerous reports of arms supplies to the Bosnian Croats from the Republic of Croatia. We have pressed the Croatian Government to cease military support for the Bosnian Croats and to exert their influence to bring the fighting to an end.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pressure Her Majesty's

Government have put on the Croat Government to withdraw their forces from Bosnia-Herzegovina; what efforts Her Majesty's Government have made to persuade the Croat Government to stop supplying the republic they have declared there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham, on 17 May, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to recall Her Majesty's ambassador to Zagreb in the light of Croat aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We have no such plans.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list visa requirements for Croat citizens entering the United Kingdom; and what plans he has to review them in the event of changes in United Kingdom-Croat relations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I have been asked to reply.

Nationals of Croatia are not subject to a United Kingdom visa requirement, and there are no present plans to impose such a requirement.

CSCE

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a comprehensive list of all the names and nationalities of the top officials of all the bodies, committees, ad hoc groups and structures of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Goodlad: The CSCE internal address list which I have placed in the Library of the House lists on pages 57 to 80 the names of the officials who staff the CSCE institutions. Meetings of participating states, whether of the Council of Ministers, Committee of Senior Officials or ad hoc groups formed to deal with a specific task, are chaired by the Chairman-in-Office, currently Sweden.

The Council of Ministers has appointed a Secretary-General, Mr. Wilhelm Hoynck. He will take office in Vienna in June.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates of establishment, and of winding up if applicable, of all the bodies, committees, ad hoc groups and structures of the institutions of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Goodlad: Details have been placed in the Library of the House giving the dates of establishment of CSCE institutions, secretariats, steering and ad hoc groups.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide a complete list of addresses of all the offices of the various structures of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Goodlad: I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the CSCE internal address list. Pages 57 to 80 include a full list of addresses of CSCE institutions and offices.

Human Rights

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will assign a member of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights department to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office consular section to monitor the abuse of human rights outside the United Kingdom in consular and legal matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The consular department consults the human rights policy department as a matter of course for advice on cases where the human rights of British individuals are in question.

Raymond Bickley

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the French authorities concerning the absence of access to legal representation for Raymond Bickley since his imprisonment in December.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: After learning that Mr. Bickley's court-appointed lawyer did not attend with him the examining magistrate's hearing on 30 March, Her Majesty's consul-general in Paris wrote to the batonnier, equivalent to the president of the local bar, expressing concern. The batonnier asked the lawyer to visit Mr. Bickley immediately, and undertook to act on any complaint from Mr. Bickley that his defence had suffered as a result of the lawyer's non-attendance at the hearing. The batonnier will report again to the consul-general.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council held on 10 to 11 May.

Mr. Hurd: I attended the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May with the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones). The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), represented the United Kingdom on 11 May.

The Council approved the EC/United States agreement on Government procurement reached on 19 April. The Council also agreed a resolution on trade and the environment proposed by the Danish presidency in advance of the OECD ministerial meeting on 2 June.

Lord Owen briefed Ministers on recent developments in the former Yugoslavia. They agreed on the importance of continued support for the Vance-Owen peace plan. The Twelve should maintain pressure for the closure of the Serb/Bosnia border and be ready to contribute to international monitoring of it. Other options should not be excluded. Ministers also agreed on the crucial importance of rigorous implementation of the sanctions regime.

The Council agreed that the presidency should discuss with the European Parliament arrangements for an inter-institutional meeting on 7 June, with the aim of concluding an inter-institutional agreement on subsidiarity and of agreeing arrangements for the European parliamentary ombudsman. The Council also agreed that a paper presented by the Commission on access to

information held by the Community institutions was a good basis for further work. It asked the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) to take this forward.

Over lunch, Ministers discussed progress in the enlargement negotiations with Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The Commission reported on the latest round of negotiations, held in St. Petersburg on 6 and 7 May, for a partnership and co-operation agreement with Russia.

The Council discussed the Commission's paper for the Copenhagen European Council on strengthening relations with the central European associate countries. There will be further discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council on 8 June.

An EC/GCC ministerial meeting was held in the margins of the Council on 11 May.

No formal votes were taken at the Council.

EDUCATION

Testing

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to his statement of 11 May, *Official Report*, column 651, what investigations were carried out into the abortive costs involved in the changes to the system of testing announced in his statement; what is the total cost; and what are the projected costs of external marking by external examiners of the tests of 11 and 14-year-olds.

Mr. Forth: The cost of developing and distributing the non-mandatory tests for seven-year-olds in technology, history and geography is estimated at £1·7 million. The cost to date of development of history and geography tests for 14-year-olds is estimated at some £300,000. This expenditure has not been wasted. There will be a continuing obligation on schools to teach technology, history and geography at key stage 1 and to teach history and geography at key stage 3. It will continue to be good practice for teachers to assess pupils' progress against the national targets in these subjects.

The non-mandatory tests in technology, history and geography which have already been delivered to primary schools are explicitly designed to support and inform teachers' own assessments. The work to date on history and geography tests for 14-year-olds will inform guidance to teachers on making their own assessments of pupils' progress and may contribute to the work of devising new tests in future. Lessons learnt from experience gained will be taken into account in Sir Ron Dearing's review of the curriculum and assessment framework.

My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing to advise on the merits of external marking of tests for 11 and 14-year-olds, including the costs.

Radio Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education who is responsible for the provision and maintenance of radio hearing aids for *(a)* pre-school children, *(b)* children at school and *(c)* students in further and higher education.

Mr. Forth: Where a radio hearing aid is specified as special educational provision in the statement of special educational need of a pre-school child or a child attending a school, it is the duty of the responsible local education authority to arrange for the provision and maintenance of such aids.

The Further Education Funding Council and local education authorities are under duties to secure further education provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These duties require them to take account of students' additional learning support needs.

Within higher education, it is for individual higher education institutions to consider the arrangements necessary to meet the additional learning support needs of such students. Eligible students in higher education may be entitled to three disabled students allowances as part of their mandatory award, including up to £3,325 for specialist equipment.

National Vocational Qualifications

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what progress he is making in developing national vocational qualifications for those working within the field of education;

(2) if he will publish the report of the task group of Department for Education officials and representatives of employer and employee interests within education, which met last year to recommend an education lead body for teacher training; and if he will publish his response;

(3) what lead bodies he has set up to look at the adoption of NVQs within education.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment are considering developing NVQs in the education sector and relevant lead body arrangements. They will shortly be consulting and taking into account recent developments in further education and training.

Schools Inspection

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will list the criteria used to assess and select candidates to become school inspectors under the new schools inspection regime; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many people from non-educational backgrounds have been selected to go forward as lay inspectors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The selection of candidates for training as school inspectors under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 is a matter for the Office for Standards in Education.

I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to my hon. Friend.

"Testing: The Facts"

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost per pack of the information pack "Testing: The Facts"; how many have been circulated and to whom; and what was the total cost of production and distribution.

Mr. Forth: The cost of each pack was £1. About 3,600 have been distributed to date to the following:

all Members of Parliament for England;
the 1,000 top companies;
Church leaders;
training and enterprise councils;
regional chairmen of the CBI and Institute of Directors;
chambers of commerce;

regional directors of the Department of Trade and Industry and the Employment Department;
trade unions;
the national press;
Vice Chancellors; and
heads of information of Government Departments.

The total cost of production and distribution is estimated at £9,100.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what qualifications the hon. Robin Gibson Watt has which are relevant to his recent appointment to the board of the Development Board for Rural Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I give full consideration to all relevant factors in determining appointments for which I have responsibility.

I have every confidence that the hon. Robin Gibson Watt will make a valuable contribution to the work of the board during his term of office.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many names he has on the list of potential nominees for places on non-departmental public bodies in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will publish the list of potential nominees for appointment to non-departmental public bodies in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: There are currently 2,851 names on the Department's register of candidates for public appointment, which is confidential.

Drugs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total number of registered drug addicts in each local authority area in Wales in each year from 1987 onwards.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The numbers of drug addicts notified by medical practitioners to the chief medical officer at the Home Office are given in "Statistics of Drug Addicts Notified to the Home Office, UK, 1991" which is held in the Library of the House. Figures for each district health authority in Wales from 1987 to 1991 are found in table A8 of the "Area Tables" supplement.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has concerning the use of designer drugs within schools in each local education authority area in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what efforts are currently made by his Department to collect information on the numbers of unregistered drug addicts in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Welsh drug misuse database was set up in 1991 to provide regular national and local profiles on those drug users in contact with various services. Some of those drug users will be registered on the addicts index while others will be unregistered.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how much has been spent by the national health service in Wales in meeting claims for medical negligence in each year from 1987;

(2) how much has been spent by each district health authority in Wales on litigation cases in each year from 1987; and how much was paid by each district health authority in litigation during claims for compensation on the grounds of medical negligence affecting children born with disabilities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not held centrally.

A494

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current position on plans for the improvement of the A494 Bala to Corwen road, between Merlyn Gwyn and Glanrafon; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A topographical survey has been completed and route improvement options identified; the environmental impact of each option will be investigated. Construction work could start before April 1996 subject to the satisfactory completion of engineering design, statutory procedures and the availability of resources.

Radio Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who is responsible for the provision and maintenance of radio hearing aids for *(a)* pre-school children, *(b)* children at school and *(c)* students in further and higher education in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Local education authorities have a duty to arrange for the provision and maintenance of radio hearing aids for children in school or pre-school who have statements of special educational needs which specify such an aid as educational provision.

The Further Education Funding Council and local education authorities are under duties to secure further education provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. These duties require them to take account of students' additional learning support needs.

It is for individual higher education institutions to consider the arrangements necessary to meet the additional learning support needs of students in higher education. Eligible students in higher education may be entitled to three disabled students allowances as part of their mandatory award, including up to £3,325 for specialist equipment.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Heart of England Wood Carvers

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Heart of England Wood Carvers to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 14 to 18 June.

Fire Regulations

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what *(a)* building, *(b)* fire and *(c)* health and safety regulations apply to the Palace of Westminster; which regulations in each category would apply to the Palace of Westminster if not for Crown immunity; and which officials are responsible for enforcement of each category of regulation.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply.

It is the policy of the Commission, notwithstanding immunities and exemptions provided for in legislation, to apply the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and all other relevant statutory provisions throughout the parliamentary estate, whether part of the Palace of Westminster or not. With regard to:

(a) Building Regulations. Administrative procedures are in place in the parliamentary works directorate to ensure that all the technical requirements of the regulations are met.

(b) Fire Regulations. The Home Office fire services' inspectorate is responsible in consultation with the parliamentary works directorate for ensuring the appropriate standards in the Fire Precautions Act 1971 are met.

(c) Health and Safety Regulations. The statement of policy and organisation is set out in appendix C of the "House of Commons Staff Handbook". I have asked that a copy of the appendix referred to above to be sent to the hon. Lady.

Heads of House departments are responsible for the operation of these policies in their areas of responsibility.

Ms Walley: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will estimate in relation to the Palace of Westminster how many (i) employees and (ii) members of the public are in the Palace of Westminster on weekdays when the House is sitting.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Curry: In August 1989, the registrar investigated a complaint which alleged improper use of agricultural census information to compile a list of growers required to pay the Horticultural Development Council levy. The registrar was satisfied that no census material or computerised information had been disclosed to the Horticultural Development Council and no remedial action was necessary.

There have been no other complaints.

Potatoes

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Farm Commissioner to secure that the proposals set out by the Commission on potato production include a definition of new potatoes which will be applicable to potato producers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Curry: The definition of new potatoes contained in the Commission proposal will apply to potato producers throughout the European Community.

Subsidised Meat (West Africa)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made, or has been made by the relevant Commissioner or director general within the European Community, of the effects of export of subsidised meat to west Africa on pastural agriculture there.

Mr. Curry: I am aware of the concern the effect of Community beef exports on local cattle production in certain west African countries. The agricultural directorate-general of the European Commission is at present carrying out an assessment of this. We will seek an early indication of its findings.

Captive-bred Birds (Tanzania)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many licences were issued for the import into the United Kingdom of captive-bred birds from Tanzania in each year since 1989;

(2) how many *(a)* captive-bred birds and *(b)* consignments of captive-bred birds were imported into the United Kingdom from Tanzania in each year since 1989;

(3) how many applications for licences to import captive-bred birds from Tanzania have been received by his Department since March 1991; and how many are currently pending.

Mr. Soames: Information on the importation into the United Kingdom of captive birds from Tanzania is as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Number of import licences issued	29	30	5
Number of consignments imported	21	24	5
Number of birds imported	38,472	36,426	14,439

Notes:

1. MAFF statistics do not differentiate between captive bred and wild caught birds.
2. The issue of licences for import of captive birds from Tanzania was suspended in March 1991. It was subsequently agreed that licences could be issued with effect from 5 May 1993.

Since March 1991 the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has received three applications for import licences for captive birds from Tanzania. No import licences were issued.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many IACS forms were received by 15 May; and what proportions of those were from *(a)* mostly arable and *(b)* mostly livestock farms.

Mr. Gummer: We received about 155,000 IACS application forms in the United Kingdom by 15 May. We are not able to provide a breakdown between arable and livestock farms.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what proportion of IACS forms received were fully acceptable and will not involve any penalty for the farmer in whose name they were completed;

(2) what proportion of forms completed by *(a)* mostly arable farmers and *(b)* livestock farmers will be liable to incur penalties.

Mr. Gummer: We have not yet carried out the detailed checking of IACS that will determine whether the applications are fully acceptable, or whether penalties will have to be applied.

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what period of time arable and livestock farmers had to complete their IACS forms.

Mr. Gummer: Most farmers had a minimum of about six weeks between receiving the IACS documentation and the 15 May deadline for receipt of the completed applications.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Disposal

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to establishing new planning guidelines for waste-to-energy incineration plants to give due weight to their environmental and economic value.

Mr. Maclean: In the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" the Government clearly stated that it would "promote the recycling of as much waste as possible, including the recovery of materials and energy".

The environmental and economic implications of energy from waste, through incineration and other methods, are considered in waste management paper 1 "A Review of Options" and waste management paper 28 "Recycling". Guidance on the development control implications of various waste disposal options, including energy from waste incineration, will also be provided through a new planning policy guidance note on "Planning and Pollution Control" which is due for publication soon.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the likely impact on United Kingdom waste disposal activity of reductions in existing incineration capacity, due to new EC emissions standards, after 1996.

Mr. Maclean: The Department has been in close contact with local authorities which operate municipal waste incinerators about the action needed to meet the requirements of directive 89/429/EEC. Some incinerators will have to close because it will not be cost-effective for them to be upgraded in order to achieve the necessary standards, others are to be upgraded and new plants are to be built. The directive itself is not thought likely to have a significant effect on the proportion of waste disposed of by incineration.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from waste regulation authorities as a result of his recent announcement of an indefinite postponement in the introduction of a waste management licensing system.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a joint representation on behalf of the Institute of Wastes Management, the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors and certain bodies representative of waste regulators. I understand that the local authority associations concerned also wish to be associated with that. I hope to meet them soon. Officials have already commenced discussions on the matter with representatives of the local authority associations. As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *470*, I shall give a revised date for waste management licensing as soon as I am in a position to do so.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made to his Department on the proposals for a possible landfill levy; and what assessment he has made of its effect on the environmental standards at waste management facilities.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The organisations listed below have commented on the report by consultants Coopers and Lybrand for my Department on "Landfill Costs and Prices: Correcting Possible Market Distortions", published in February 1993. We are still considering the report and responses to it.

The new waste management licensing system which we are introducing under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will ensure that high environmental standards are maintained at waste management facilities.

The organisations who responded to the report are:

Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment
Aluminium Federation Ltd.
Associated Energy Products plc
Biffa Waste Services Ltd.
Black Country Development Corporation
British Paper and Board Industry Federation
British Plastics Federation
Building Employers Confederation
CAIRD Environment Ltd.
Cambridge City Council
Cardiff City Council
Combined Heat and Power Association
Community Recycling
Confederation of British Industry
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Cory Environmental Ltd.
Council of Welsh Districts
County Planning Officers' Society
Cumbria County Council
Erewash Borough Council
Food and Drink Federation
Friends of the Earth
Gillingham Borough Council
Hales Waste Control
Haul—Waste Ltd.
ICI
Incpen
Institute of Wastes Management
Leigh Environmental Ltd.
London Borough of Croydon
London Waste Regulation Authority
McKenna and Co.
National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors
National Association of Waste Disposal Officers
National Association of Waste Regulation Officers
Newspaper Society
North Wales Waste Management Group
Nottingham City Council
Organic Reclamation and Composting Association
Resource International Ltd.
Rhone—Poulenc Limited
Richards Engineering Ltd.
Sand and Gravel Association Ltd
Shanks and McEwan Group plc

South East London Combined Heat and Power
Terry Adams Ltd.
Tioxide Europe
Waste Management International
Waste Management International
Waste Watch
Yorwaste Ltd.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what prosecutions have taken place to date of companies failing to apply for authorisations under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, in the fields of *(a)* incineration, *(b)* glass and ceramic manufacture, *(c)* timber processing and *(d)* dye production.

Mr. Maclean: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has prosecuted one company for operating a timber treatment process without being authorised to do so under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Information about prosecutions by local authorities under part I of the Act broken down by category of process regulated is not routinely collected and could be obtained now only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the level of awareness by companies of the duty of care requirements under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The Government conducted a substantial publicity campaign on the duty of care on its introduction in April 1992. This was well received and more than a million copies of a free explanatory leaflet, which is still available, were distributed to trade associations and companies. The Department employed MORI to review the effectiveness of this and other publicity campaigns. The results of its survey, carried out in December 1992, showed overall high levels of awareness of information on the duty of care. It was clear that awareness was greater among waste disposers than among waste producers. Subsequently, companies have become more aware of the requirements on inquiry from their waste disposal contractors and local authorities.

EC Environment Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he plans to put forward at the EC Environment Council meeting in Aarhus on 14 to 16 May.

Mr. Maclean: The meeting in Aarhus, at which I represented the United Kingdom, was an informal Council. Ministers discussed three topics proposed by the Danish presidency: transport and the environment, the review of the structural funds regulations, and employment and the environment. No formal conclusions were adopted nor decisions taken.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department's Building Research Establishment published the report "An Interim Evaluation of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme" prepared by N. A. Oseland and D. D. Ward; and what are its principal conclusions.

Mr. Maclean: The report was placed in the Library of the House on 29 April 1993. The report concluded that improvements under the home energy efficiency scheme in 1991-92 gave mean potential fuel bill savings of £39 per annum, although 77 per cent. of the potential energy saving was taken as improved warmth. CO_2 levels were potentially reduced by an average of 0·7 tonnes per household per annum, although the actual saving was 0·14 tonnes.

The study also found significant improvements in warmth and comfort, and a significant reduction in condensation problems. Two thirds of those interviewed would not have carried out the work without the HEES grant. Half paid no client contribution, 14 per cent. thought the work had been funded by their local authority. The quality of work was rated as "good", and 75 per cent. of recipients were positive about the scheme overall.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information the United Kingdom gave the European Commission in its preparation of COM(93)88 Final on the third report from the Commission on the present situation and prospects for radioactive waste management in the European Community; and if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom management of radioactive waste of the Commission report.

Mr. Maclean: The report updates and supplements the information presented in similar previous reports forwarded to the Council in 1983 and 1987. All the data relating to the United Kingdom were supplied by the relevant United Kingdom authorities.

UV-B Radiation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to publish the results of the predictive modelling exercise of ultraviolet-B (UV-B) radiation in the United Kingdom conducted by his Department.

Mr. Maclean: First results from the Department's prediction of stratospheric change project at the university of Cambridge are expected during 1994. Publication in the scientific literature will be encouraged, as it is for all the Department's research programmes. In addition, results will be available to the Department's stratospheric ozone review group and to the international scientific assessment of ozone depletion under the Montreal protocol.

Drinking Water

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the United Kingdom Government's policy on changing the EC standard of 50 mg/l for lead in drinking water to 10 mg/l.

Mr. Maclean: We expect that the European Commission will wish to consider proposing a change to the current standard for lead in the drinking water directive of 50 micrograms per litre (µg/l) in the light of the revised guideline for lead of 10µg/l announced by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The United Kingdom will play its full part in discussion of proposals for a revised directive.

Bottlenose Dolphins

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to undertake a census and research programme into the bottlenose dolphin population in United Kingdom waters.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are financing several research projects intended to provide information on what further measures may be needed to conserve populations of small cetacean species present in the United Kingdom coastal waters, including bottlenose dolphins. But much of the fundamental work—including population surveys—needs to be undertaken on a European scale.

On 6 November 1992, my colleague, Lord Strathclyde, announced that the Government would contribute £110,000 over two years towards the costs of an international survey of the populations of small cetaceans in the North sea. This will establish authoritative baseline information upon which further research and conservation efforts can be built.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the draft EC proposal for a regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

Mr. Maclean: My Department has received a number of representations about the draft proposal from the European Commission for a regulation, including ones from green groups and from industry. We have not yet received the draft proposal.

Radioactive Inventory

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the joint DOE/Nirex United Kingdom radioactive inventory will be published; whether it will include full details of radioactive waste generated by the military nuclear programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The 1991 United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory was published on 7 May 1993. It gives full details of radioactive waste arising in the United Kingdom, including Ministry of Defence sites. A copy of the inventory is in the House Library.

Fanfare for a New World Concert

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 10 May, *Official Report*, column *348*, on the Fanfare for a New World concert, when the Merseyside development corporation met Janet and Nic Corke, representing creditors; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: A meeting was held with Merseyside development corporation on Tuesday 17 November 1992. This meeting was at the request of Mr. Corke, who asked for an informal discussion. Mrs. Corke informed the MDC of her concern with regard to the financial situation of the promoter of the Fanfare event and Mr. Corke explained the large financial losses incurred by himself which had affected his business adversely. While expressing sympathy, MDC stressed that it had no legal power to intervene in the situation. Neither Mr. Corke nor Mrs. Corke indicated they were representing the creditors as a body.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 10 May, *Official Report*, column *384*, on the Fanfare for a New World concert, what was known about the proven track-record of Rod Gunner, associate producer of Fanfare for a New World; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: MDC was aware at an early stage that Mr. Gunner had been the director of a company which had previously suffered financial difficulties. In relation to the Fanfare event, however, Mr. Gunner was to act as technical producer only and without involvement in the financial affairs of Carroll Promotions Ltd. Inquiries had revealed that Mr. Gunner had a successful track record in technical matters and it was known that he had successfully produced the Symphony for a Spire attended by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales as well as a number of other complex outdoor events.

Greenhouse Gases

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the scope and predicted magnitude of the additional administrative costs that will be incurred in implementing the European Commission proposal for a monitoring mechanism for Community carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, COM(93)125 as set out in the paragraph on financial implications of his departmental memorandum 5705/93 of 23 April on the Commission proposal.

Mr. Maclean: Once adopted, the proposed Council decision would require member states to submit periodically to the Commission details of their greenhouse gas emissions and programmes for limiting these. Since the framework convention on climate change already contains similar requirements, this should not represent a significant additional administrative burden for the United Kingdom.

United Nations Commission on Human Settlements

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom proposals to the matters discussed and decisions taken at the 14th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements in Nairobi, 26 April to 5 May; and if he will place a copy of the conclusions in the Library.

Mr. Maclean: The 14th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements identified the issues to be taken up by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to be held in June 1996 and provided guidance for member states to follow in their preparations for the Conference.

The Commission adopted a resolution that recommended that Habitat II should focus on two major themes:

(a) Sustainable Human Settlements in an Urbanising World

(b) Adequate Shelter for All.

The United Kingdom supported this resolution and played a leading role in its drafting. The United Kingdom delegation also contributed to debate on the two special themes discussed at the session on appropriate,

intermediate, cost-effective building materials, technologies and transfer mechanisms for housing delivery, and the improvement of municipal management.

A set of the resolutions adopted by the Commission will be placed in the Library when printed.

Water Systems, Germany

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance United Kingdom experts have given the eastern Lander in Germany to improve the environmental standards of water systems in their region.

Mr. Maclean: United Kingdom water companies and environmental consulting engineers are making major efforts to increase their business in the new Lander. To publicise this country's experience in the water industry and the role of private capital, the British Water Industries Group has held seminars in Halle, Dresden and Berlin. I found the interest in the British water industry very encouraging when I attended the Berlin seminar and in meetings with German Environment Ministers I have drawn their attention to the wide-ranging expertise the industry has to offer.

Environmental Legislation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the methods adopted by the European Commission to assess compliance with EC environmental legislation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: It is for the European Commission to decide, within the framework of the relevant regulation or directive, how best to assess compliance with EC legislation. During our presidency the Commission agreed to present an annual report on implementation and enforcement to the Council of Environment Ministers; the first such report was produced in December. We continue to wish to see the European Environment Agency established as soon as possible and to press for the establishment of an audit inspectorate.

Environmental Pollution

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which European Community member states have a formal provision for consultation with other EC member states on trans-border impacts of environmental pollution.

Mr. Maclean: Certain multilateral treaties and some Community directives on environmental issues contain provisions requiring formal consultation between the parties concerned where there are potential trans-border impacts. We do not hold records of bilateral arrangements between other member states.

Bromley

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports he has received from the district auditor concerning financial irregularities by the London borough of Bromley between 1988 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: None. District auditors are independent of central Government; they make their reports to the bodies which they audit, and to the Audit Commission. I understand that the district auditor for Bromley is working closely with the police who are currently investigating an alleged fraud within the borough. He will decide what action he should take, if any, when the investigation is complete.

Biological Diversity Convention

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's current timetable for the United Kingdom ratification of the biological diversity convention agreed in Rio.

Mr. Maclean: We are aiming to establish the basis for the ratification of the convention on biological diversity by the end of this year.

International Oceanographic Council

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the ecological results of the 1992 International Oceanographic Council cruise in the Gulf.

Mr. Maclean: The results of the cruise are summarised in the report of the United Nations Environmental Programme executive director to the governing council on 10 to 21 May 1993 (UNEP/GC 17/1/9: 26 April 1993).

Homelessness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for homelessness in *(a)* the west midlands area and *(b)* the Coventry area.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities in England report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing Act 1985 in their quarterly PI return.

The latest estimate for the west midlands appears in table 1 of "Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act 1985: England. Statistics for the fourth quarter 1992"; the latest reported figure for Coventry appears in the supplementary table of the same publication, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the *(a)* causes and *(b)* level of homelessness within ethnic minority communities.

Sir George Young: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 26 April 1993, *Official Report*, columns *317-18*. Two current research projects—one on single homelessness and one on the causes of homelessness among ethnic minorities.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how far the review of the system of standard spending assessments calculation has progressed; and when the review of SSAs will be completed.

Mr. Robin Squire: We have so far received replies from 112 local authorities responding to our invitation to make

repesentations on the review of standard spending assessments and to provide evidence to support any proposed changes.

There have been three meetings between my officials and representatives of the local authority associations to discuss technical issues.

The review of SSAs will be completed in time for any changes to be incorporated in the revenue support grant settlement for 1994-95.

Stock Transfers

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he took to satisfy himself that each authority to which he gave his approval on 20 April to proceed with stock transfer proposals could demonstrate that ultimately its proposal would be likely to be acceptable to the tenants affected.

Sir George Young: In deciding on the likely acceptability of an authority's transfer proposals to tenants, I considered the evidence given by the authority in its application for the programme and also its record in tenant involvement and consultation. Where tenants of particular local authorities had written to express their views on the proposals, these were also taken into account. Stock transfers will, of course, only go ahead where the ballot shows the majority of tenants to be in support of the idea.

Housing Management Contracts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities have recently let, or propose to let, contracts for the management of part or all of their housing; and if he has been asked to give his consent as required by section 27 of the Housing Act 1985.

Sir George Young: Apart from cases of delegation of housing management to tenant management organisations, there is no reason why the Department should be informed that a local authority is working towards letting a management agreement or contract. Before an authority enters into a management agreement, the Secretary of State's approval is required under section 27 of the Housing Act 1985. Wandsworth borough council has recently asked the Secretary of State to give his approval to a management agreement.

Housing Corporation

Sir James Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Housing Corporation's latest estimate of the output from its approved development programme in 1992-93.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation estimates that in the last financial year its approved development programme will have funded the provision of at least 60,000 new homes. Final figures will be available next month. Together with the 6,000 homes which the corporation estimates have been provided by local authority housing association grants, this means that public funds enabled housing associations to make an estimated 66,000 extra homes available to new tenants last year.

I regret that in recent answers to the House and in the Adjournment debate on 26 April, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and I said that the Housing Corporation's estimate was 80,000 homes. The corporation has since informed me that in making this estimate it miscalculated the output from its programme. I am grateful for the opportunity to inform the House of this correction. I have written separately to the hon. Members concerned.

Liverpool Projects

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the Project Rosemary in Liverpool.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Much has been achieved since the project began in 1990. The new women's hospital and Renshaw's factory expansion are the biggest developments of their type in inner Liverpool. Family housing for sale and rent is being built on four different sites, with local people closely involved in their layout and design. Eyesores are being removed and roads improved. The park at Crown street is soon to be extended and improved.

As well as transforming the appearance of the area, new investment is being used to provide training opportunities, full-time jobs, and subcontracting work for local people and businesses. More will follow as the project proceeds.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Dean of Liverpool on his enterprising role in initiating this considerable success story alongside the other agencies involved, especially Liverpool city council, the Liverpool area health authority and the Housing Corporation.

Dogs

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to widen the scope of byelaws for the control of dogs in public places.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* There are currently three main types of dog control byelaw—removal of dog mess, dogs on leads and dog bans—which local authorities can seek to apply to most types of public area, using a variety of enabling powers.

Byelaws cannot be used to regulate matters which are addressed in primary legislation. Powers to control ferocious and dangerous dogs are already the subject of a number of statutes, including the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to establish pilot schemes for the licensing of dogs.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* None.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Self-employed People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the total number of self-employed people in Wales; and what estimate he has of the number claiming *(a)* sickness benefit, *(b)* invalidity benefit, *(c)* severe disablement allowance, *(d)* income support, *(e)* attendance allowance, *(f)* mobility allowance, *(g)* invalid care allowance, *(h)* maternity allowance, *(i)* child benefit, *(j)* one-parent benefit, *(k)* widow's payment, *(l)* basic pension, *(m)* family credit and *(n)* housing benefit.

Mr. Scott: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, dated 18 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking what are the total number of self-employed people in Wales; and what estimate he has of the number claiming (a) Sickness Benefit, (b) Invalidity Benefit, (c) Severe Disablement Allowance, (d) Income Support, (e) Attendance Allowance, (f) Mobility Allowance, (g) Invalid Care Allowance, (h) Maternity Allowance, (i) Child Benefit, (j) One Parent Benefit, (k) Widow's payment, (l) Basic Pension, (m) Family Credit and (n) Housing Benefit.

It is not possible to give a valid estimate for the complete range of information requested. For several of these benefits self-employed status is not relevant to the determination of entitlement. Nor are relevant statistics routinely collected from which estimates of other benefits claimed by self-employed people in Wales could be devised.

However, estimates are available for Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Family Credit. These were based on a sample collected from the Social Security Management Information Statistics. The sample also included Housing Benefit, but the figures obtained do not provide a basis for a reasonable estimate. The available estimates are appended.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Estimated number of self-employed recipients in Wales

Benefit	*Estimated number*
Sickness benefit	[1]3,700
Invalidity benefit	[1]9,300
Severe disability allowance	[1]300
Family credit	[2]4,000

[1] 1 per cent. sample taken on 30 March 1991.
[2] 5 per cent. sample taken on 31 October 1992.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what efforts have been undertaken by his Department to conduct publicity campaigns aimed at the self-employed in Wales to publicise *(a)* their obligation to pay national insurance contributions and *(b)* their social security benefit entitlements.

Miss Widdecombe: The provision of publicity and information on social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Mr. Michael Bichard to Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, dated 18 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what efforts have been undertaken by his Department to conduct publicity campaigns aimed at the self-employed in Wales to *(a)* publicise their obligation to pay National Insurance contributions and *(b)* publicise their social security benefit entitlements.

I have consulted with my colleague Ann Chant, Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, for the details on the National Insurance contribution aspect of your question and include this aspect in my reply.

The Benefits Agency, in line with the Department of Social Security's bilingual policy for Wales, has set up a Welsh Language Unit which has responsibility for implementing the policy.

All the leaflets giving information on social security benefits and NI contributions are available in Wales and there is a continuing programme to produce them in bilingual versions. Many of the most widely used leaflets (such as *Which benefit?*) are already in bilingual form and there are a number of widely used claim forms in Welsh. A bilingual poster advising customers of the new Quarterly Billing system for payment of NI contributions has been displayed recently in district offices.

Evidently, the process of producing further bilingual material is a gradual one and we are committed to making continued progress in this work. One of the leaflets currently in bilingual production is *FB 30 Self Employed?* Also, there will shortly be bilingual material available on the Contributions Agency's charter and the service they provide.

In addition, there is the Welsh Freeline telephone number —providing general information on benefits in Welsh to all customers, including the self employed.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Immigrants and Refugees

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on providing benefits to immigrants and refugees arriving in the United Kingdom without means of support in each year since 1987.

Mr. Burt: This information is not available. No separate departmental records are kept of benefit payments to immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers.

Benefits Agency Staff

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the monthly budget for staffing of the Benefits Agency for each month since April 1992; and how much of this budget was spent in each month.

Mr. Burt: The management of the Benefits Agency budget is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Richard Burden, dated 18 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what was the monthly budget for staffing of the Benefits Agency for each month since April 1992; and how much of this budget was spent in each month.

The Agency has to manage within a total allocation and it allows its managers the flexibility to move resources between

staff and other running costs in order to achieve their objectives in the most cost effective way. The attached table compares provisional expenditure on staff with managers' own plans. When accounts close, we expect to have spent about £6 million less than managers' plans over the year (0·6 per cent.). Individual monthly figures are significantly affected by factors such as the dates of pay awards and the processing of pay adjustments.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

£ million

Salaries	*Managers' monthly plans*	*Monthly spend*	*Monthly variance*
April	72·136	72·136	0·000
May	69·210	70·350	1·140
June	78·003	77·894	−0·109
July	73·049	75·624	2·575
August	81·657	77·719	−3·938
September	79·770	78·286	−1·484
October	81·135	79·469	−1·666
November	95·264	88·570	−6·694
December	83·108	83·455	0·347
January	85·307	82·645	−2·662
February	90·521	88·060	−2·461
March	94·039	102·725	8·686
Total	983·199	976·933	−6·266

Missing Giro Cheques

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many giro cheques were issued by his Department in each year since 1987; how many and what percentage were reported stolen or missing in each of those years; what was the value of the stolen or missing giro cheques in cash terms and at constant prices; and if he will publish a breakdown of those figures for each of his Department's offices.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Marshall, dated 18 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many girocheques were issued by his Department in each year since 1987; how many and what percentage were reported stolen or missing in each of those years; what was the value of the stolen or missing girocheques in cash terms and at constant prices; and if he will publish a breakdown of those figures for each of his Department's offices.

The number of girocheques reported missing or stolen, after being issued by the Department of Social Security, in the years since 1987 are:

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Number issued (million)	32·056	30·884	34·484	34·470	36·190
Value of issues (£ million)	2,184	2,366	2,752	3,083	3,432
Number reported missing/ stolen	104,854	84,901	89,176	83,849	86,004
Percentage	0·327	0·275	0·259	0·243	0·238
Value of missing/stolen girocheques based on an average of					
(a) Issues each year (£ million)	7·144	6·504	7·117	7·499	8·156
(b) 1987-88 issue value (£ million)	7·144	5·783	6·075	5·712	5·859

The figures of missing or stolen girocheques are collated nationally; it is not possible to supply the information in a form relating to individual Benefit Offices or Benefit Groups. Additionally, the Employment Agency acts as our agent in the provision of girocheques to those who are unemployed and claiming Income Support. Data relevant to those issues cannot be separately identified and are, therefore, not included in the tables above.

I hope that you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Benefits (Automatic Credit Transfer)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the proposal to cease to pay pensions at post offices, and pay them instead into bank accounts or building society accounts; and what account he has taken of the effect of his proposal on the viability of smaller post offices.

Miss Widdecombe: We have made no such proposal.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which geographical areas are covered by the trial currently being undertaken on payment of benefits and pensions by automatic credit transfer; how many payments have so far been made by ACT; how many of these payments were for retirement pensions; what is the expected cost of the exercise; and what consultations he has had with the chief executive of the Post Office about this project.

Miss Widdecombe: The payment of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Peter Hain, dated 18 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking which geographical areas are covered by the trial currently being undertaken on payments of benefits and pensions by automated credit transfer (ACT); how many payments have so far been made by ACT; how many of these payments were for retirement pensions; what is the expected cost of the exercise; and what consultations he has had with the Chief Executive of the Post Office about this project.

Trial versions of the Retirement Pension claim form were issued between 1 and 11 March 1993. These forms were issued to people throughout the United Kingdom. The cost of the

claim form trial is expected to be around £22,000. No payments have been made to customers completing trial forms, as Retirement Pension claim forms are issued four months before retirement age.

Details of consultations with the Post Office are contained in the *Official Report*, volume 224, columns 445-446.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report* and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what considerations underlie his policy to encourage recipients of specific benefits to receive their benefits by way of bank accounts; which benefits are involved; what steps he has taken, and at what cost, to further this policy; and what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of effects of the success of such a policy.

Miss Widdecombe: Since automated credit transfer was introduced in 1982, our policy has always been to encourage people to take up the option of payment by this method, which is a more cost-effective, safer and easier way for them to receive their benefits.

The benefits for which ACT is currently available are:

Attendance Allowance
Disability Living Allowance
Disability Working Allowance
Pensions/Widows Benefit
Child Benefit
One Parent Benefit
Family Credit
War Pensions

The facility will be available to pay income support by ACT from October 1993; unemployment benefit through a rolling programme between May 1993 and October 1994; and sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance through a rolling programme between May 1993 and January 1994.

For the steps taken, and the costs incurred, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) on 26 April at columns *313-14*.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on *(a)* those EC countries, besides the United Kingdom, that have contributory state retirement pension schemes and *(b)* those which place a geographical restriction on the payment of full retirement pensions.

Miss Widdecombe: State retirement pensions are contributory in every other EC member state apart from Denmark and the Netherlands, where pension entitlement is linked to residence rather than employment record. Information on pensions in EC countries can be found in the MISSOC tables, a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on geographical restrictions on payment of retirement pensions is not available.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's policy concerning the provision of smoke alarms to recipients of income support and other benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Social security benefits do not include any specific sum in respect of the provision of smoke alarms.

Industrial Injuries

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the report by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on bringing the self-employed in construction and agriculture into the industrial injuries scheme will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The council's report was published today (Cm 2177) and copies are available in the Library. The report recommends that the industrial injuries scheme should be extended to include self-employed earners in the construction and agriculture industries. We have considered the report, which the council submitted to us last November, very carefully, but have not accepted the council's recommendation. Implementing IIAC's recommendation would represent a significant expansion of the scope of the scheme, which we do not consider would be justified in principle, or workable in practice.

The industrial injuries scheme has always been intended for workers employed under a contract of service to an employer. In 1978, the Pearson commission recommended the inclusion of the self-employed in the scheme, but the Government rejected the recommendation on principle and because of the substantial operational difficulties involved. IIAC recently decided to reconsider the position of self-employed workers in the light of the increase in self-employment during the 1980s. The present recommendation to include self-employed construction and agricultural workers in the industrial injuries scheme is seen by the council as a possible first step towards extending the scheme to the self-employed generally.

Those who undertake self-employment do so in the knowledge that provision against industrial injury will be their own responsibility, and that private insurance is available to them. The Government consider that this is right in principle and do not accept the need to alter the present well-established position. We also remain of the view that extending the industrial injuries scheme to self-employed workers would raise significant practical difficulties.

Fraud

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 16 March, *Official Report*, column *214*, how many of the cases of social security investigations in *(a)* England and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside resulted in identified overpayments (i) inclusive of prosecutions for fraud and (ii) exclusive of prosecutions for fraud.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefit fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 18 May 1993:

I wrote to you on 20 April 1993 about your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1993, Official Report, column 214, how many of the cases of social security investigations in *(a)* England and *(b)* Yorkshire and Humberside resulted in identified overpayments (i) inclusive of prosecutions for fraud and (ii) exclusive of prosecutions for fraud.

In that letter I gave you the figures for the year ending 31 March 1992 but indicated that I would send you the figures for the year ending 31 March 1993 when they became available. I am pleased to inform you that these figures are now to hand.

In the year ending 31 March 1993 a total of 62,193 investigations in England resulted in an identified overpayment. Included in this figure are 8,443 identified overpayments in the Yorkshire and Humberside area.

I hope you will find this information helpful. A copy of this letter will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Key: None.

Privacy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he is considering for protection in the media of the personal privacy of prominent persons.

Mr. Brooke: We intend to introduce legislation, on the lines recommended by Sir David Calcutt, to criminalise certain acts of physical intrusion into personal privacy with intent to obtain information or other material with a view to publication. We have also accepted Sir David's recommendations for further consideration to be given to four other measures bearing on privacy. We will set out our views on his recommendation for a statutory press complaints tribunal in responding to the National Heritage Select Committee's report on privacy and media intrusion.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to encourage the development of museums and galleries in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Key: The Department seeks to encourage the development of those national museums and galleries for which it has direct funding responsibility in a number of ways designed to increase public access to collections, encourage greater efficiency in the provision of services and to bring about the refurbishment of the buildings in which the national museums and galleries are housed.

The Department also funds the Museums and Galleries Commission, a royal charter body. The aims of the commission include the development and maintenance of higher standards in museums and galleries and the commission also gives financial assistance for this purpose.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has for meeting the repair and refurbishment needs of museums and galleries.

Mr. Key: The museums and galleries sponsored by the Department of National Heritage have submitted their corporate plans to the Department. The information contained in these plans, including information on proposed repair and refurbishment, will be considered in the course of the current public expenditure round. Spending plans will be announced in due course.

Gambling

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if moneys spent on the national lottery will be classified as gambling.

Mr. Key: I refer to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 28 October 1992, *Official Report*, columns *687-88*.

National Lottery

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much per head of population he estimates will be spent on the national lottery in each year from 1994 to 1998.

Mr. Key: It is not possible to make such estimates, which depend upon the degree of success of the national lottery.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what specific guarantees were obtained from the GAH group of consultants that information contained in the report on the national lottery commissioned by his Department would not be sold to third parties by the group;

(2) if he will publish the text of the contract agreed between his Department and the GAH group of consultants regarding his commissioned research on the national lottery, minus financial details which are regarded as commercial in confidence;

(3) what was the length and word count of the report of the national lottery commissioned by his Department from the GAH group;

(4) if he will list the subject and chapter headings contained in the report on the national lottery commissioned by his Department from the GAH group;

(5) what guarantees were obtained from the GAH groups of consultants that, following their completion of the commissioned research from his Department, the company would not subsequently offer consultancy advice in respect of the national lottery to private individuals or companies;

(6) which parts of the *(a)* text, *(b)* subject headings, *(c)* chapters and *(d)* tables contained in the report on the national lottery recently published by the GAH group are similar or identical to the (i) text, (ii) subject headings, (iii) chapters and (iv) tables contained in the report on the national lottery commissioned by his Department from the GAH group; and if he will list them;

(7) what inquiries he has made with the GAH group of consultants regarding subsequent consultancy and advice work in respect of the national lottery which the group has given to private individuals and/or companies; and if he will publish a list of all such work subsequently undertaken by the GAH group;

(8) on what date he was first made aware by the GAH group of consultants that they intended to publish a

commercial report on the national lottery; and what steps he took to obtain a copy of the report in advance of publication.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The Department of National Heritage contract with the GAH consultancy is commercially confidential and I do not intend to publish it. The recent report "The UK National Lottery Report" published by the GAH group on 10 May 1993 is a different document from the report produced from the Government, and appears to be based on a synthesis of published sources and new and separate research. The publication of this report does not appear to constitute a breach of the contract between my Department and the GAH group. The GAH group did not inform the Department beforehand of its intention to publish such a report.

Government contracts do not normally place restrictions on the future clients a contractor may take on—either particularly or generally. However, the GAH group has given a firm undertaking in honour not to work for potential bidders for the national lottery licence.

Redundant Churches

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will enable denominations to dispose of redundant places of worship to the Historic Chapel Trust for less than full consideration.

Mr. Brooke: I have today made a direction to this effect under section 4(11) of the Redundant Churches and Other Religious Buildings Act 1969.

HEALTH

NHS Trusts

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure on *(a)* remuneration and *(b)* other expenses incurred by national health service trust board chairmen and members for each of the last two years.

Mr. Sackville: The summarised accounts of national health service trusts in England for 1991-92 record the total remuneration and emoluments of chairmen and members of NHS trust boards as some £15·5 million. This figure includes all fees, emoluments and pension contributions, but excludes travelling, subsistence and similar expenses which are not separately identifiable. Equivalent information for 1992-93 will be available later this year.

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much her Department has spent on the Wellcome manufactured whooping cough vaccine; what were the other vaccines on the market at the time that vaccine began to be used by the NHS; what has been the safety record of each of these vaccines; when it first came to the attention of her Department that there were suspected brain damage cases; when the Wellcome vaccine was withdrawn from prescription in England; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: For most of the period since whooping cough vaccine first became available, the vaccine has been ordered direct from the suppliers by district health authorities and by general practitioners. Details of total expenditure on the Wellcome product are therefore not available centrally. Other whooping cough vaccines, from Glaxo Laboratories and the Lister Institute, were available in the United Kingdom when immunisation began in 1957, but their manufacturers subsequently discontinued production. Information on the safety of these products is not available without considerable historical research, at disproportionate cost.

Suggestions in the 1970s that serious complications following immunisation were occurring more frequently than previously thought led to the joint review by the Committee on the Safety of Medicines and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. The joint review reported in 1981. Its main conclusion was that the connection between permanent brain damage and whooping cough vaccine had not been established. More recently, an extensive study by the United States Institute of Medicine concluded that there is insufficient evidence to indicate a causal relationship between diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine and chronic neurological damage and other specified disorders.

All vaccines are examined carefully before release for safety and efficacy and only vaccines which match exacting specifications are used. All adverse reactions to vaccines are carefully monitored both by the CSM and the JCVI which advise the United Kingdom health departments.

The Wellcome whooping cough vaccine has not been withdrawn. It is now supplied by Evans Medical as a combined vaccine with diphtheria and tetanus, known as DTP, and supplied for the United Kingdom's childhood immunisation programme. More than 90 per cent. of infants receive DTP and reported cases of whooping cough in this country have fallen to exceptionally low levels, with only one death since 1990.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the budget of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Mr. Sackville: The provision for advances to and payments on behalf of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority for 1993-94 is:

	£
Current expenditure	1,068,000
Capital expenditure	18,000

The authority is required to recover 50 per cent. of its running costs through fees paid by licensed centres.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken to ensure enforcement of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 in every laboratory capable of doing such work in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sackville: All research projects using human embryos must be licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. Applications for a licence must have prior approval from a local research ethics committee and are subject to peer review before being considered by an HFEA licence committee. Research projects are monitored and the premises where the work is carried out are regularly inspected by the HFEA.

Human Cloning

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence she has that human cloning experiments have already taken place in the United Kingdom using techniques routinely used for cloning farm animals.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mental Illness

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will extend the national survey of mental illness to be carried out on behalf of the Department by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys to cover mental illness among people over the age of 65 years; and on what grounds it has been decided to limit the national survey on mental illness to the 16 to 64 age group.

Mr. Yeo: No. Establishing levels of mental illness in children and young adolescents and in people aged 65 and over requires a different methodology.

Considerable data are already available on the prevalence of mental disorders in elderly people. These will shortly be supplemented by a study currently in progress by the Medical Research Council which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Cervical Cancer

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date departmental representatives will visit the Galton research laboratory at the university of London to see a demonstration of the HDA test for cervical cancer.

Mr. Sackville: Officials have already spoken to the founder of QUEST—developers of the hydrolised DNA assay test—to discuss the arrangements.

Public Toilets

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies she has commissioned of the public health consequences of a reduction in the numbers of public toilets and an increase in the incidence of sleeping rough.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received about allowing voluntary residential schools to provide secure accommodation; what plans she has to amend the Secure Accommodation Regulations under the Children Act 1989; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: A number of organisations have recently made inquiries about the prospect of providing secure accommodation. On 2 March my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced our intention to amend regulations to enable private and voluntary providers to provide secure accommodation. We intend to issue a consultation document shortly.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she has plans to amend the list of the items of data that comprise the contract minimum data set in view of the comments made in a recent report from the Data Protection Registrar; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The content of the contract minimum data sets is not in question, apart from one or two items of data. The need for these items is being reviewed by officials who will meet shortly with the registrar to agree how best to address his concerns.

Pensioners (Discharge from Hospital)

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has concerning early discharge of pensioners from hospital because of the reduction in their pensions after six weeks if they reside in a nursing or residential home.

Mr. Yeo: Decisions about the discharge of patients from hospital and the type of care most appropriate to meet their individual care needs are for the professional staff involved and must be made on clinical grounds.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims were made for compensation in instances of medical negligence affecting children born with a disability in each year since 1987; how many *(a)* were settled or withdrawn prior to court hearings and *(b)* resulted in successful court hearings; and what was the average amount paid out in compensation.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Children

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children there were at the most convenient date in each year since 1977; and how many of them were aged on those dates *(a)* under one year, *(b)* between one and four years, *(c)* between five and nine years, *(d)* between 10 and 14 years and *(e)* between 15 and 17 years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Estimated numbers of children resident in England and Wales, 1977-91.

(Thousands)

Mid-year (30 June)	*Total children aged under 18*	*Ages (years):—* *0*	*1-4*	*5-9*	*10-14*	*15-17*
1977	13,272	559	2,492	3,801	4,091	2,329
1978	13,093	568	2,371	3,691	4,071	2,392
1979	12,936	617	2,309	3,536	4,023	2,451
1980	12,776	639	2,317	3,386	3,941	2,493
1981	12,591	634	2,371	3,196	3,889	2,501

Mid-year (30 June)	Total children aged under 18	Ages (years):— 0	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-17
1982	12,369	620	2,443	3,032	3,791	2,483
1983	12,148	623	2,496	2,923	3,680	2,426
1984	11,954	623	2,510	2,916	3,528	2,377
1985	11,823	649	2,502	2,960	3,388	2,324
1986	11,730	655	2,528	3,025	3,214	2,308
1987	11,635	664	2,562	3,099	3,060	2,250
1988	11,581	686	2,602	3,164	2,957	2,172
1989	11,512	680	2,666	3,178	2,951	2,037
1990	11,496	686	2,694	3,194	2,993	1,929
1991[1]	11,552	702	2,725	3,219	3,057	1,849

[1] The estimates for 1991 are provisional. Final 1991 population estimates (taking account of later 1991 Census results) will be published in June 1993, and estimates for the period 1982-90 will be revised slightly thereafter to make them fully consistent with these final 1991 figures.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken by her Department into the feasibility of developing a non-fault compensation scheme to deal with claims of medical negligence affecting children born with a disability.

Mr. Sackville: None.

West Midlands Regional Health Authority

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will announce the new chairman of West Midlands regional health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have appointed Mr. Bryan Baker, the former deputy chairman of Tarmac plc, as chairman of West Midlands regional health authority with effect from 16 July.

Mr. Baker will succeed Sir Donald Wilson, who has been temporarily chairing the authority since January. Mr. Baker will carry forward the work begun by Sir Donald in implementing important management changes in the region.

Sir Donald will return to his former role as chairman of Mersey regional health authority. Professor Alasdair Breckenridge, the present Mersey chairman, will resume his role as the university member on the Mersey regional health authority board.

Mental Health

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to lay before Parliament a revised code of practice under section 118 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Yeo: We have today laid the revised code of practice and copies have been placed in the Library.

Laboratory Technicians

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 10 May, *Official Report*, column *356-57*, on medical laboratory scientific officers, if the national health service employs laboratory technicians who are not required to have the MLSO qualification.

Dr. Mawhinney: The national health service employs technicians to perform a range of functions in hospital departments with laboratories and the qualifications required depend upon the nature of the post.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated by the Mid Essex hospital trust at *(a)* Broomfield hospital and *(b)* St. John's hospital in its first year as a trust; and what were the numbers treated in those hospitals each of the two previous years.

Mr. Sackville: The figures, which relate to finished consultant episodes in the general and acute specialities, are as follows:

	Number
1990-91	31,661
1991-92	32,567
1992-93	32,538

All figures are aggregates relating to the same grouping of hospitals in the trust; it is not possible to give separate figures for Broomfield and St. John's because data on the individual hospitals are not available centrally.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Citizenship

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the principal rights conferred on British citizens by virtue of their citizenship.

Mr. Charles Wardle: British nationality legislation does not itself confer rights directly upon British citizens; and there is no definitive list of such rights.

Relate

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the annual grant to Relate in each year since 1979 expressed in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* 1993 values.

Mr. Jack: The Home Office grant in aid to Relate for each year from 1980-81 is set out below in cash terms and real terms using 1993-94 as the base year.

	Cash terms £	Real terms £
1980-81	555,000	1,152,887
1981-82	704,000	1,333,611
1982-83	750,000	1,326,275
1983-84	788,000	1,331,839
1984-85	827,460	1,331,010

	Cash terms £	Real terms £
1985-86	864,570	1,318,717
1986-87	890,500	1,315,933
1987-88	912,870	1,278,715
1988-89	935,910	1,222,010
1989-90	958,890	1,174,790
1990-91	1,006,840	1,142,092
1991-92	1,107,500	1,177,782
1992-93	1,511,400	1,552,960
1993-94	1,530,500	1,530,500

In real terms there has been an increase of 32·75 per cent. in the grant over the period in question.

Gambling

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent per head of the population on gambling in each year since 1988; and what is his estimate for each year to 1996.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No estimate is readily available for the financial year 1988-89, and we have no forecasts for future years.

Estimated figures for net consumer expenditure on gambling—amount staked less winnings—per head per annum in the four years from 1989-90 to 1992-93 inclusive are £58, £52, £54 and £55.

Seized Assets

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by name, location and amount the projects which have shared in the £2·2 million distributed by the seized assets fund.

Mr. Jack: The projects which received a share of the £2·2 million in the seized assets fund during 1992-93 are listed in the table.

Bids selected for funding from seized assets fund 1992-93

Her Majesty's Customs and Excise

	£
1. Integrated intelligence system trials (trials for enhancements of HMCE's CEDRIC intelligence system)	100,000
2. Semi-inflatable boat and trailer (for use in patrolling and gathering intelligence on west coast of Scotland)	29,000
3. Links to traders' computers at Dover (giving Customs access to information on channel ferry operators' passenger and freight computers)	50,000
4. Links to traders' computers at London airports (giving access to principal airline computers at four London airports)	43,000
5. Links to traders' computers at East Anglian ports (giving access to computers of 11 shipping lines)	37,000
6. Links with DTI and traders' computers at Liverpool	9,900
7. Links with traders' computers at various ferry ports	40,000
8. Computer intelligence enhancement system	125,000
9. Computer links with Cavewood Hauliers	15,000
10. Publicity campaign to encourage use of drugs freephone facility	150,000
11. Computer links with Containerbase	15,000

Department for Education

	£
1. National Association of Boys Clubs: publication and dissemination of report on three-year drugs programme	15,000
2. TACADE: four pilot "Caravan About Drugs" projects, enabling young people to make short anti-drug films for use with other groups of young people	35,000

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

	£
1. Fast inshore patrol boat for Gibraltar Customs	40,000
2. Customs patrol boat for Thailand	54,000

Department of Health

	£
1. Fire safety work at Clarendon project, north Bedfordshire	3,000
2. Refurbishment of counselling rooms, Drugs Concern, Barnet	1,500
3. Switchboard for new officers of substance misuse team, North Hertfordshire	2,000
4. Computer equipment for Gatehouse clinic, Ealing H. A.	2,000
5. Furniture and word processor for Tower Hamlets community drugs team	13,200
6. Harm reduction initiative, Bromley H. A.	2,000
7. Publicity materials for Milestones and HIV prevention programme, Bexley H. A.	3,157
8. Factline projects and prison outreach expenses, Brighton	3,326
9. Database for Croydon community health team	3,805
10. Mobile telephone for north-west Surrey needle exchange	400
11. Drug publicity for north-west Surrey	300
12. Kitchen extension to residential rehabilitation unit, Holy Cross, Haslemere	6,800
13. Staff training, Liverpool drug dependency clinic	3,800
14. Capital costs to establish New Start day centre, Manchester city council	15,890
15. Extension to needle exchange scheme, Newcastle FHSA	6,000
16. Development of minimal intervention/treatment package for primary health-care workers, North Tyneside	5,500

	£
17. Purchases of clinical equipment, Bradford CDAS	15,000
18. Portable substance misuse health shop, Bassetlaw HA	2,500
19. Facilities for children and portable gym (to encourage drug misusers with children into services), Sheffield H. A.	1,424
20. Youth outreach Worker, Nottingham Drug Dependents Anonymous	13,500
21. Renovation of clinical room, North Staffordshire Substance Misuse unit	12,980
22. Drop-in cafe project, Birmingham	25,000
23. Regional solvent misuse seminar, East Gloucestershire	2,000
24. GP research project on drug misuse, Avon	2,500
25. Computer equipment, NACRO south-west regional drug training unit	2,650
26. Training material and courses in 1992, Coke Hole, Andover	1,000
27. Publicity for meedle exchange scheme, Salisbury	1,100
28. HIV prevention project among intravenous drug users, Cambridgeshire Health Authority	20,500
29. Portable office building, Ley community, Oxon	25,000
30. Research into reliability of on-site drug testing kits, Charing Cross and Westminster medical school	9,000
31. Counselling and treatment services expansion, Open road, Colchester	8,300
32. Prison education, Brighton	1,150
33. Refurbishment of therapy area, west Lambeth	2,950
34. Mobile phones, St. George's drug dependency unit	1,500
35. Database for drugs and AIDS counselling and advisory services, South West Thames regional health authority	7,500
36. Training package for voluntary sector staff, Bury	1,200
37. HIV needle exchange worker, Freshfield, Truro	10,751
38. Publicity materials, West Essex	700
39. Children's facilities, Phoenix house, Sheffield	4,110
40. Leicester Action for Youth Trust: Furnishing for new services for HIV-positive misusers	8,000
41. Hull and East Yorkshire community drug project: Needle disposal project	3,600
42. Furness Drug Concern: Training for volunteer counsellors	1,500
43. Eastbourne community drug team: Computers	2,814
44. Cambridgeshire LEA: Booklet for school children	1,000
45. Yeldall Manor Readin: Upgrading residential rehabilitation building	9,571
46. South-west Durham: Establishment of needle exchange scheme	1,250
47. Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster FHSA: training primary healthcare team	1,000
48. Pegasus, NE Thames: new residential facility	20,000
49. CADA (Campaign Against Drug Abuse) Old Kent Road: furniture and equipment	5,000
50. SW Thames Family Support Drugline: furniture and improvement to office	4,390
51. Association for Prevention of Addiction, Hastings; refurbishment	2,000
52. Harringay: needle exchange equipment	6,500
53. SHADO, Liverpool: telephone system	2,621
54. Manchester Mainline: volunteer training and development	6,000
55. Basingstoke Drug Service: information, education and training	15,400
56. Birmingham: Allens Croft project	24,000
57. Central Notts HA: syringe dispensing machine	3,345
58. NW Durham: needs assessment in Stanley area	1,250
59. Oxford Drug Dependency Team: extension to centre	27,000
60. Airedale voluntary drug and alcohol agency: staff training	1,185
61. Bridge project, Cambridge: extension to drop-in project	30,000
62. Brighton and Hove drug prevention team: Tabloid project	22,172
63. Blackburn solvent abuse group: training, capital, adminstration	4,000
64. Riverside community drug team, west London: methadone services	30,000
65. Lewisham Drugline: computer	2,800
66. Family support drugline, Wallington: computer	2,950
67. North Liverpool community drug team: creche, leisure equipment, Land Rover	30,000
68. Manchester FHSA: drug misuser support group	15,000
69. South Warwickshire drug advisory service: education and training resources	1,995
70. Durham HA: establishment of needle exchange	4,000
71. West Yorkshire Probation: drug education/ training for offenders	3,000
72. Northampton Council on Addictions: resources for young offenders	9,000
73. West Suffolk drug advisory service: mobile phones	3,500
74. Nottingham drug dependants anonymous: refurbishment	10,000

	£
75. Portsmouth drug dependency service: refurbishment of interview rooms	7,000
76. Exeter drug project: residential development worker	26,205
77. Mid-Downs health authority: computers	15,000
78. Druglink, Hemel Hempstead: staff training	2,195
79. Kent Council on Addictions: prison outreach	2,250
80. Barking and Brentwood: resources to develop Havering base	20,000
81. St. Helens and Knowsley community drug team: expansion	6,987
82. Darlington health authority: publicity for needle exchange	427
83. Wakefield FHSA: training equipment for primary healthcare workers	4,000
84. Aylesbury Drugstop: phonelines	744
85. North Birmingham health authority: computer equipment, Slade Road centre	1,992
86. MIND, Barnsley: rental of premises	10,000
87. West Norfolk and Wishbech health authority: establishment of needle exchange	16,500
88. Lifeline Manchester: Women's magazine on drugs	4,500
89. Drug concern Watford: To establish training courses	2,500
90. Seaside centre, Eastbourne: Refurbishment	500
91. West Surrey and North-East Hants health authority: Portakabin extension for community drug team	10,000
92. South Sefton Advisory Committee on Drug and Solvent Abuse: drugs helpline service for families of drug misusers	745
93. Darlington health authority: training course for local GPs	300
94. Bromsgrove and Redditch health authority: additional facilities for tranquilliser withdrawal project	3,130
95. Scunthorpe health authority: needle exchange	18,400

Home Office

	£
1. CLUE computer terminals for three sites (to retrieve operational data from collated information during operations), No. 9 regional crime squad	78,000
2. Computer software for drug profit confiscation, executive co-ordinator, regional crime squads	3,500
Encrypted radios for the following police forces:	
3. Greater Manchester police	41,830
4. Merseyside police	50,000
5. No. 5 regional crime squad	25,000
6. Northumbria police	11,500
7. Kent police	30,000
8. South Wales police	29,000
9. Derbyshire police	31,000
10. Nottinghamshire police	45,041
11. South Yorkshire police	42,253
12. West Midlands police	9,930
13. Hampshire police	18,000
14. Lancashire constabulary	32,000
15. Sussex police	29,000
16. Leicestershire constabulary	30,000
17. Holloway prison: drug/alcohol rehabilitation courses	15,200

Overseas Development Administration

	£
1. Construction of carpentry workshop and provision of tools for children at risk from cocaine, Cochabamba, Bolivia	27,000

Scottish Office

	£
1. Vehicle tracking equipment for Scottish crime squad (for use in operations against drug traffickers)	16,000
2. Surveillance vehicle for Scottish crime squad	25,000
3. Ferguslie Park partnership Paisley: one-year drug worker	20,000
4. Wester Hailes partnership Edinburgh: development of drug misuse educational project, Wester Hailes, Edinburgh	6,000
5. Equipment for drug reduction programme, Saughton prison, Edinburgh	25,000
6. Association of Nurses Against Substance Abuse: four-day summer school	6,000
7. Castlemilk partnership Glasgow; development of training course for Castlemilk families support group	23,000
8. Whitfield partnership Dundee: outreach worker for drugs project	23,000
9. Computer equipment for a drugs project to assist in the evaluation of effectiveness of drugs services	6,000

Welsh Office

	£
1. Training courses for drug workers, Gwent DHA	7,000
2. Drug training for teachers, social workers, Dyfed	3,000

	£
3. Training for generic and volunteer workers, Powys	6,830
4. Clwyd drug prevention services training programme	6,000
5. Enhanced facilities at Rhoserchan project (residential rehabilitation)	5,000
6. Ty Glyn Housing Society: accommodation and rehabilitation of ex-misusers	10,000
7. Gwynedd Drug Quarterly Newsletter	1,500
8. Prevalence study on amphetamine use in South Glamorgan	8,000
9. South Glamorgan small projects fund (to meet one-off bids from local voluntary groups)	4,000
10. Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations community and self-help development fund (to meet one-off bids from local voluntary groups)	3,000

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the £1 million allocated to the police from the seized assets fund was spent.

Mr. Jack: The moneys allocated in 1992-93 to the central drugs fund from the seized assets fund were used to meet some of the additional costs of international drugs investigations by the police and HM Customs and Excise; and to make reward payments to individuals who had assisted the enforcement agencies in their investigations.

Identity Cards

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department last evaluated the merits of introducing universal photo identity cards in the United Kingdom; and if he will publish the results.

Mr. Jack: The introduction of a compulsory identity card was last considered in depth in 1988-89, when the Government concluded that the benefits of issuing identification cards did not outweigh the disadvantages and costs of doing so. The Government's views were given to the House by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), on 10 February 1989, *Official Report*, columns 1299-309.

Although the matter is kept under review, the position remains as stated then.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the results of his Department's examination of the present experience of the operation in *(a)* Belgium, *(b)* Greece, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Spain and *(e)* France of their national identity card schemes.

Mr. Jack: Earlier reviews have studied overseas practice in respect of identity cards in detail. These showed that possession of a national identity card was mandatory in Belgium, Greece, Germany and Spain. It was mandatory to carry an identity card in Belgium and Greece. Identity cards were voluntary in France but very widely used. This remains the position.

In all these countries the police are empowered to require citizens to identify themselves, a process which possession of an identity card obviously simplifies. No such general power exists in this country, where the police may only demand identification on reasonable suspicion that an offence has been committed.

Emergency Warning System

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation's national emergency warning system is still operational; and on what date he intends to have a new system fully operational.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation siren-based national air raid warning system was closed towards the end of last year. Alternative arrangements which are based on radio and television broadcasts exist. Studies are being carried out to see whether any enhancement of these facilities is required.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department what study has been made of the efficacy of the emergency national warning system in the Netherlands; and what plans he has to introduce a similar system in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are aware of the Netherlands system but have no plans to introduce similar arrangements here.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home department if he will make a statement in relation to progress being made towards agreement on the proposed European Commission directive on data protection; and if he will outline the areas where there is still disagreement between member states.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a question from him on 31 March, *Official Report*, column *220*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the United Kingdom's position to exclude manual files containing personal information is impeding harmonisation of the United Kingdom data protection legislation with that of other member states of the European Community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The exclusion of manual files from the Data Protection Act 1984 is no impediment to harmonisation of data protection legislation across the European Community at the level of the Council of Europe convention. With regard to the draft EC data protection directive, the position of manual data is only one of a range of issues needing to be resolved before a common position can be reached. While it would not be appropriate for me to disclose the negotiating position of individual member states, a number of other countries share the United Kingdom's concern about the proposed application of the directive to manual files.

Ecstasy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seizures of the drug Ecstasy have occurred within the year from 1989; and what information he has on the percentage of seized Ecstasy which is domestically manufactured within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: Information on the number of seizures of MDA (Ecstasy) is given in the table.

	Number
1989	769
1990	399
1991	1,735

None of the seized drugs are thought to have been manufactured in the United Kingdom.

Witness Support Schemes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been undertaken by his Department into the adoption of witness support schemes in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: In association with a number of children's organisations in the voluntary sector, the Home Office and other Government Departments have helped to develop a "Child Witness Pack". This was published earlier this month. The pack builds on the major legislative reforms concerning the giving of evidence by children which were introduced by the Criminal Justice Acts of 1988 and 1991. The pack is intended to help children who may have to give evidence in court and their parents or carers.

The child evidence reforms are being independently monitored over two years to assess their effectiveness. We are considering whether additional monitoring may be required specifically in relation to the "Child Witness Pack".

A copy of the "Child Witness Pack" is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In addition, the courts charter sets out service standards for the way all victims and witnesses are to be treated before and during any trial.

Bail Support Schemes

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money has been allocated to each local authority in Wales for bail support schemes for young people in each of the last three years.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 4 February to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), columns *297-98*. No further bail support schemes have become operational in Wales under Home Office funding arrangements. An application from West Glamorgan social services is under consideration.

Escorted Prisoners

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have died while being transported under Prison Service escort for each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tony Blair, dated 17 May 1993:

Deaths of prisoners under prison service escort

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of prisoners who have died while being transported under Prison Service escort in each of the last five years.

I am glad to say that in fact no prisoners have died since 1988 while under escort provided by the Prison Service. This excludes any cases in which prisoners who were already very seriously ill or injured (for example, due to an attempted suicide in the prison) may have died in an ambulance or other escort vehicle on the way to an outside hospital. Checking precisely how many deaths have occurred in these circumstances would require an extensive search of records and would be at disproportionate cost.

You will of course be aware of the case of Mr. Ernest Hogg who was found unconscious in a cellular van while under escort by Group Four Escort Services and who later died in hospital. We in the Prison Service deeply regret Mr. Hogg's tragic death and I have ordered a full inquiry into the circumstances. Of course a full public inquiry will also take place in due course in the form of the Coroner's inquest.

Mr. Ernest Hogg

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of the journey leading up to the death of Ernest Hogg while in Group 4 custody, including details of the route taken and the time when he was first discovered in an inebriated state.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tony Blair, dated 17 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply directly to your Parliamentary Question about the death of Ernest Hogg.

Since a police investigation is underway into the circumstances of Mr. Hogg's death, and I understand that an inquest is to be held, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Safer City Projects

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the criteria that will be used to decide the location of the 20 new safer city projects announced on 7 January.

Mr. Jack: The new safer cities project will, as before, be based on London borough, metropolitan district or district council areas.

For the first six projects, the criteria for selection include:

- high crime rates—normally a chosen area would be expected to have significantly higher crime rates than the average for England and Wales;
- the willingness of local agencies to participate in the programme;
- the area should be an urban priority area—excluding areas which have existing safer cities projects;
- the area should be targeted for other Government action.

Account will also be taken of points made by local authorities and others who have written in support of their areas becoming safer cities.

Consideration is also being given to including a candidate for Wales.

For later projects, further appraisal will be given to the selection criteria.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total sum of money available *(a)* in this financial year and *(b)* in a full

financial year to the 20 safer city projects announced on 7 January; and what is the highest and lowest level of aid given to any individual project.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* It is not possible to give precise figures until the tendering process for the second phase of the safer cities programme referred to in the statement which I placed in the Library of the House on 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *601-2*, is complete.

Cardiff Prison

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the non-teaching functions which will be paid for in respect of Cardiff prison in a full year under the contract awarded to Bristol university and the number of staff hours under each heading in a full year, together with the total number of non-teaching hours allowed for;

(2) if he will list the non-teaching functions paid for in respect of Cardiff prison in each of the past five years and the number of staff hours under each heading in each year, together with the total number of non-teaching hours in each year;

(3) if he will list the subjects taught by the prison education service at Cardiff prison in each of the past five years and the total number of teacher hours provided in each subject in each year and the total number of teaching hours provided in each year at the prison;

(4) if he will list the subjects that will be taught at Cardiff prison under the contract awarded to Bristol university, the number of teaching hours he estimates will be provided in respect of each subject in a full year and the total number of teaching hours that will be available at the prison in a full year;

(5) what is the total cost of the prison education system for Cardiff prison under the contract awarded to Bristol university, and the proportion that will go to direct payment for teaching hours;

(6) if he will give for each of the last five years the total cost of the prison education service at Cardiff prison, and the proportion in each year of direct teaching hours.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alun Michael, dated May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the provision of education services at HM Prison Cardiff. Not all of the information which you have sought is held by the Prison Service in the form requested. The information that is available is set out below and in the enclosed tables.

Table A provides an outline of the non-teaching duties previously required at the prison and which will initially be required of the new contractor. These are only indicative since requirements change, depending on the needs of the prison population. The Prison Service requires that these duties are undertaken but does not specify the number of hours allocated to them.

Previously Local Education Authorities were reimbursed for the actual cost of providing teachers together with an additional 5 per cent. towards the cost of administration. The new contract prices will be based on teaching time (teacher contract hours). This unit of price includes all other costs. Details of proportional costs are not held but it is estimated that over the past five years some 25 per cent. of the cost of providing teachers has been for non-teaching duties.

An indication of the subjects required at HM Prison Cardiff in 1993-94 year is set out in Table B, together with the teaching hours for each subject. The details may be subject to change during the course of the year dependent upon the on-going requirements of the prison. Subjects provided in the last five years are shown at Table C together with average teaching hours. The cost of that provision and annual teaching hours in each year are shown in Table D. The cost for 1993-94 under the new contract will be the product of the total number of teaching hours required (estimated to be 6,776) and the teacher contract hour price agreed with the contractor. The contract price will be determined in negotiations with the successful tenderer, in the light of the outcome of the appeal against the High Court judgment of 24 March in the case of Kenny and Woodroffe *v.* South Manchester College.

Table A

Non-teaching duties undertaken by education staff

Library management
Conducting inmate interviews
Preparing inmate records and reports
Curriculum development
Organising external courses
Examination administration
Marketing education
Administering education competitions—Koestler awards, etc
Maintaining up-to-date inmate class lists
Attending establishment management meetings
Maintaining staff attendance records and preparing payment sheets
Equipment purchase
Preparing inmate earnings
Undertaking extra curriculum activities

Table B

Subjects to be taught at Cardiff prison—financial year 1993-94

Subject	*Teaching hours*
Basic Education and Social Life Skills	1,472
Computers	460
Health Education	644
Cookery	368
First Aid	152
Art	1,104
Chess	92
Craft	460
Drama	184
Music	368
Photography	92
Woodwork	184
Welsh	92
General Education	920
Pottery	184
Total	6,776

Table C

Subjects taught at Cardiff prison during last five years

Subjects	*Years taught*	*Average teaching hours*
1. Basic education and social life skills	1988—present	1,472
2. Art	1988—present	825
3. Basketry	1988—1991	92
4. Calligraphy	1988—1990	92
5. Chess	1991—present	92
6. Computers	1988—present	552
7. Cookery	1990—present	460
8. Craft	1988—present	460
9. Current affairs	1988—1991	92
10. Drama	1988—present	92

Subjects	Years taught	Average teaching hours
11. First aid	1988—present	184
12. General education	1988—present	552
13. Geography	1988—1990	184
14. Health education	1988—present	368
15. History	1988—1990	92
16. Music appreciation	1988—1990	92
17. Music practical	1988—present	368
18. Photography	1988—present	92
19. Plastering theory	1988—1990	92
20. Pottery	1988—present	184
21. Religious education	1988—1991	184
22. Welsh	1988—present	92
23. Woodwork	1988—present	276

Table D
Cost of education at Cardiff prison during last five years

Financial Year	£
1988-89	127,179
1989-90	144,189
1990-91	151,000
1991-92	164,400
1992-93	166,700

Teaching hours provided in each of the last five years

Academic Year	Hours
1988-89	6,437
1989-90	6,196
1990-91	[1]4,303
1991-92	6,449
1992-93	6,544

[1] Disturbances at the prison resulted in a temporary reduction in population and a resulting reduction in teaching hours required.

Tenders (Employment Protection)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if future invitations to companies to tender for Home Office businesses will make it clear whether the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 apply.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. Invitations to tender will invite companies to make their own assessment of whether the regulations apply. The nature of their bid will determine whether they apply, and this cannot be determined in advance.

Unit Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the failure of the unit fines system as implemented by his Department in England and Wales.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend concluded that it would be right to abolish the current unit fine system on the basis of experience of its working since its implementation on 1 October 1992. He took the view that under the maximum fine levels for magistrates courts approved by Parliament in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the mechanistic application of the rules for fixing unit fines was producing results which were anomalous and disproportionate in certain cases and that the constraints of a statutory scheme had unacceptably limited the discretion of magistrates to impose fines which properly reflected all the circumstances of the particular case.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reasons for the success of the unit fines system as implemented in the four pilot schemes.

Mr. Jack: I would refer the hon. Member to Home Office research and planning unit paper 59, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, which described and analysed the working of the four pilot schemes.

Forensic Science Service

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reviewing the future of the Home Office Forensic Science Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Office Forensic Science Service is now in its third year as an executive agency. During this period it has become more commercial, customer-focused and cost conscious and has improved its service to the criminal justice system as a whole. We are now undertaking a review on how best to build on this progress. The review will concentrate in particular on how to ensure the continuing independence and impartiality of the organisation and the high standards, scientific excellence and professionalism required of forensic science for criminal casework, while enabling it to operate in an increasingly business like way. It will also need to take account of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on criminal justice on the future development of forensic science.

I hope to be able to report to the House on our conclusions before the summer recess.

Police Duties (Private Contractors)

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to permit police duties to be carried out by private contractors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* There is no intention to contract out or place in private hands fundamental police duties which require the powers of a constable.

Hong Kong

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he received a letter from Mr. Geoffrey F. Dowsett concerning the governorship of Hong Kong; what reply he has sent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* No trace can be found in either Home Office or Foreign and Commonwealth Office records of the letter referred to by the hon. Member. However, questions relating to the governorship of Hong Kong would normally be a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the withdrawal of central funding on those voluntary organisations from which his Department has withdrawn such funding.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 29 April 1993]:* The considerations taken into account when a voluntary organisation applies for continued funding include: the needs of the organisation; its ability to attract funds from other sources; the basis on which existing funding was provided; and the extent to which its work contributes to the Department's strategic objectives and priorities and gives value for money.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is *(a)* the amount of Home Office grant aid received by each voluntary organisation in (i) 1991-92, (ii) 1992-93 and (iii) the amount offered to each in the current financial year and *(b)* the total amount of Home Office funding for voluntary organisations in each of these years;

(2) if he will list the voluntary organisations to which his Department has agreed to give grant aid in the current financial year;

(3) if he will list the voluntary organisations to which his Department has given grant aid in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 17-18 May 1993]:* The information requested in respect of 1991-92 has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Information for 1992-93 and the current financial year is not yet available centrally and could be obtained only ad hoc and at disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Water Charges, Strathclyde

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the metered water charges imposed by Strathclyde regional council for each year from 1989-90 to 1993-94.

Sir Hector Monro: The metered water charges applied by Strathclyde regional council for each year from 1989-90 to 1992-94 are given in the table.

Year	*Pence per cubic metre*
1989-90	27·84
1990-91	30·19
1991-92	34·40
1992-93	33·20
1993-94	[1]33·50

[1] Excluding standing charges which, if incorporated, would give an equivalent charge of 34·96 pence per cubic metre.

Education Capital Grants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria for funding under the Scottish Office Education Department capital grants scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The conditions applying to funding under the Department's capital grants scheme are set out in departmental circular No. 21/1990, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Housing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much on average was contributed by sources other than rent and the private sector to the management, repair, improvement and development of each dwelling unit in Renfrew district owned and managed by *(a)* Scottish Homes and *(b)* Renfrew district council in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Individual sources of revenue or capital income to Scottish Homes and Renfrew district council are not allocated to particular items of housing expenditure.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the oustanding capital debt attributable to the housing accounts of Renfrew district council; how much the repayments on this debt amount to in the current financial year; what percentage of the average annual dwelling-based rental charge made on council-owned houses is spent on these repayments; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The capital debt associated with the houses, buildings and land to which Renfrew district council's housing revenue account applies is estimated at £128·3 million on 1 April 1993. The council has budgeted for expenditure of some £1·8 million on the redemption of debt in 1993-94, which represents 4·6 per cent. of estimated total housing revenue account expenditure. Individual sources of revenue income to the council are not allocated to particular items of housing expenditure.

Carpet Manufacturing

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new measures he intends to introduce to ensure the continued survival and development of the carpet manufacture industry in west and central Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The carpet industry in west and central Scotland already has access to a wide range of advice and assistance from the Scottish Office, Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies. My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce any additional measures.

Crown Office Building, Edinburgh

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much it costs to maintain and upkeep the Crown Office building, the old royal high school, in Edinburgh per annum;

(2) how many times, in each of the last five years, the Crown Office building, the old royal high school, in Edinburgh has been used; by whom; and for what purpose;

(3) how many staff are employed and at what cost to maintain and keep secure the Crown Office building, the old royal high school, in Edinburgh.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The old royal high school buildings presently house the office of my noble and

learned Friend the Lord Advocate and the Crown Office. The buildings are in daily use as the functioning headquarters of the public prosecution system in Scotland. Included in the complex is the debating chamber used for sittings of the Scottish Grand Committee and occasionally hired by outside agencies as listed in the table. Expenditure on maintenance and upkeep of the whole Crown Office complex in 1992-93 amounted to £76,000. A permanent security presence is maintained at an annual cost of £77,000. Separate figures for the cost of the debating chamber, which is in use on fewer than six days each year, are not kept.

Use of the Debating Chamber:

1990

Royal Institute of Public Administration—meeting

1991

SALVO, Scottish Arts Lobby—conference

Law Society of Scotland, European Lawyers Union—annual congress

Oxford University Press—filming educational video

Bank of Scotland—debate

1992

Energy Design Advisory Service—Scottish launch of Design Advice Scheme

Lothian Regional Council—European Youth Summit

Chambers Publishers—launch of new books

1993

BMA—meeting of General Medical Services Committee

UK in Conference Ltd.—Franco-British Lawyers Society meeting

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of the sites of special scientific interest within *(a)* Renfrew district and *(b)* the Paisley, South constituency.

Sir Hector Monro: There are no sites of special scientific interest within the Paisley, South constituency. For Renfrew district the information is set out in the table. Some of these sites also lie within other districts as indicated.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest within Renfrew District

Site	*Other districts containing part of site*
Barmufflock Dam	
Boylestone Quarry	
Castle Semple and Barr Lochs	
Clochodrick Stone	
Dargavel Burn	
Erskine Langbank	Inverclyde
Formakin	Inverclyde
Glen Moss	
Lock Libo	Inverclyde
Shovelboard	
Waulkmill Glen	
	Glasgow and Eastwood

Playgrounds

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place to ensure the supervision and safety of children in playgrounds in *(a)* nursery, *(b)* primary and *(c)* secondary schools in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Education authorities have a common law duty to care for all pupils when under their charge. In addition, the Schools (Safety and Supervision of Pupils) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 impose a specific statutory duty on education authorities to take reasonable care for the safety of pupils when under their charge. In primary schools with 50 or more pupils in attendance, and in special schools, the regulations require education authorities to ensure that pupils are supervised by at least one adult when in a playground during any break time.

Listed Buildings

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of listed buildings of all categories within *(a)* Renfrew district and *(b)* Paisley, South constituency.

Sir Hector Monro: The issue raised has been delegated to the chief executive of Historic Scotland and I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graeme Munro to Mr. Gordon McMaster, dated 19 May 1993:

I refer to your recent written question to Sir Hector Monro, for answer on 12 May, regarding lists of listed buildings within *(a)* Renfrew District and *(b)* Paisley South constituency.

Lists of listed buildings together with catergories are available for public inspection at all planning authority offices. Similarly, copies of the lists are kept for public inspection at Historic Scotland's headquarters in Edinburgh.

I have enclosed copies of the lists for Paisley Burgh and the remainder of Renfrew District for your information. In addition, I have deposited copies of the lists in the House of Commons Library.

Security, Renfrew

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the application for grant for the introduction of closed circuit television on the streets of central Renfrew district; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only approach made concerning the matter has been from the hon. Member for Paisley, South in a letter to my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Local Government, which was answered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State in a letter dated 21 August 1992.

Edinburgh Dental School

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the text of the letter of 4 May from the principal and vice-chancellor of Edinburgh university concerning the closure of Edinburgh dental school and his reply to it.

Mr. Lang: It is for Sir David Smith to decide whether he wishes to publicise his correspondence. I will reply to his letter of 4 May shortly.

Youth Centre, Paisley

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the application for grant for a proposed development of a youth drop-in centre in the Glenburn area of Paisley.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am unable to make a statement because no application has, as yet, been received by the Scottish Office Education Department.

Council Tax

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will exclude people who were exempt from paying poll tax because of severe mental impairment from being part of the calculation in determining the number of persons in a house for council tax payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: This is provided for at paragraph 2 of schedule 1 to the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The qualifying conditions are prescribed at article 4 of the Council Tax (Discounts) (Scotland) Order 1992 which was laid before Parliament on 24 June 1992.

Maternity Services

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account was taken of the position and needs of maternity services in Scotland in the preparation of Cm 2018 on maternity services.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* None. Cm 2018 was the Government's response to the report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Health, which did not cover Scotland.

Maternity Services

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's proposals for the future development of maternity services in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The Scottish Office Home and Health Department has recently completed a policy review of maternity service provision in Scotland and I shall be considering its findings shortly. In addition, a "Framework for Action" working group on maternity services was set up in April 1992 to develop strategies for raising standards in maternity services with particular emphasis on identifying good practice and developing networks.

Buses

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which bus stations which were not sold as part of the Scottish Bus Group privatisation have subsequently been disposed of; on what terms; and to whom;

(2) if he will make a statement on the ownership of St. Andrew's square bus station, Edinburgh and Buchanan street bus station, Glasgow, subsequent to the passing of the Transport (Scotland) Act 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Three bus stations were retained by the Scottish Transport Group and present positions on each is as follows:

St. Andrew's Square Bus Station, Edinburgh—Negotiations are progressing with a prospective buyer.

Buchanan Bus Station, Glasgow—The lease of this property held by STG was recently sold to Strathclyde Passenger Transport Executive.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Bus Station—STG has separately marketed for sale its half interest in the property which is jointly owned with Northumbria Buses.

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the implementation in Scotland of notification of proscribed processes under part B block 1 authorisations of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* Part IV of schedule 3 of the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991 SI 1991 No. 472, prescribes for "part B" processes in Scotland by reference to blocks of process descriptions, the dates from which application may be made for authorisation to carry on an existing process. Applications were to be submitted for the first block no earlier than 1 April 1992 and not later than 31 July 1992. Therefore, to carry out a block 1 process after 31 July 1992 without applying for an authorisation under section 6 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 is an offence under the Act.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the change in full-time employment and unemployment in numbers and percentage terms since she assumed her present office; and what estimate she has made of the consequential effect on the Government's finances.

Mr. McLoughlin: Employment estimates are produced quarterly for the months of March, June, September and December. Between March 1992 and December 1992 there was a fall of 735,000, or 4 per cent., in full-time employment in Great Britain.

In the period April 1992 to March 1993 seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment in the United Kingdom increased by 251,000 or 9 per cent.

There has been no assessment of the effects of the changes in full-time employment and unemployment on Government finances.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of unemployed people in March 1990; and what is it now.

Mr. McLoughlin: In March 1990, on the seasonally adjusted basis, there were 1,597,800 claimant unemployed in the United Kingdom compared with 2,940,800 in March 1993.

Mr Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in rank order, the unemployment rates within travel-to-work areas in the United Kingdom during each of the last three quarters.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications to add human genes to animals have been made to the Health and Safety Executive since 1987; from whom these applications were made; and whether permission was granted.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. Some work of this type has undoubtedly taken place but has not fallen into categories which are specifically notifiable in advance or which require consent.

COSHH Regulations

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give for the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 the number of informations laid, the number of progress notices and the number of improvement notices served by the local authorities under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Health and Safety Executive co-ordinates voluntary returns on health and safety enforcement action from local authorities. The number of informations laid by local authorities under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations was none in 1990-91 and 18 in the year 1991-92. The returns provide the total number of improvement and prohibition notices, but do not distinguish the topic of the notice.

Career Development Loans

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information she has derived from the sample of trainees who have taken out career development loans on the proportion of them who secured employment within (a) three months and (b) six months.

Mr. McLoughlin: Career development loan follow-up questionnaires are sent out to a 20 per cent. random sample of trainees three months after completing their training. Results from this follow-up show that, over the 1992-93 financial year, 69 per cent. had obtained jobs immediately following training. A further 4 per cent. went on to take further training.

As no further questionnaires are sent out, it is not possible to provide information on those obtaining jobs after six months.

Staff Regrading

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to regrade her Department's staff with resultant staff surpluses at certain grades; if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the light of experience, certain aspects of advisory work in the Employment Service are being regraded. As a consequence, there will be a temporary surplus of some executive officer personnel. Pending their redeployment such staff that are surplus will undertake work of more junior grade on a temporary basis, albeit at their existing salary.

Training Schemes

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were participating in *(a)* employment training, *(b)* employment action, *(c)* the enterprise allowance scheme and *(d)* youth training in each region and for Great Britain as a whole in each month since December 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: As the information is contained within a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of employment training participants in March 1990 and at the latest available date.

Mr. McLoughlin: In March 1990 there were 210,000 people on employment training in Great Britain and 135,000 in March 1993.

Training Credits

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what research has been undertaken by her Department into the feasibility of offering Government-funded training credits to all persons aged 16 years to meet the learning costs of approved courses.

Mr. McLoughlin: Youth credits are already available in 20 areas of Britain and the Government's aim is that in 1996 every 16 and 17-year-old leaving full-time education will have the offer of a credit. The Department has a programme of research to evaluate youth credits schemes, to help identify good practice emerging from operational experience, encourage continuous improvement, and inform consideration of any proposals to use a credits funding mechanism in other circumstances.

Radiation ETmergencies

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations she has received in regard to the implementation of SI, 1992, No. 2997, Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received any representations recently on this matter.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what investigations her Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if she will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by her Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. McLoughlin: In the Employment Department Group 16 cases of suspected breach of a data protection principle have been investigated by the Data Protection Registrar since November 1987 when rules on "subject access" came into force. The following table consists of a summary of the 16 cases giving details of dates, nature of complaint and remedial action taken.

Summary of investigations by the Data Protection Registrar

Date and Part of EDG	*Nature of complaint*	*Remedial action taken*
November 1987 (ED HQ)	Subject access request answer not received within the 40 days time (Principle 7)	New circular issued to staff placing more emphasis on time limit. Re-issue of instructions to staff to improve communications.
9 February 1989 (ES)	A client was visited at home by ES staff. Later he was handed a printout found by a neighbour which had on it his benefit record and written information of a sensitive nature, ie, he had been in prison (Principle 8)	Case was upheld and an ex gratia payment was made to the client. Two internal investigations were carried out and the recommendations were accepted. *(a)* ES appointed a central DP co-ordinator with sole responsibility for DP issues; *(b)* A personal message on staff responsibilities under DP was sent to all staff by the Permanent Secretary; *(c)* Personal copies of a DP pamphlet were sent to all ES staff.
6 April 1989 (ED HQ)	Caller supplied telephone number to office so that officer could return her call. The number is ex-directory, but she received a call from another Department. Concerned that the number was being held on computer by departments as personal data (Principle 8)	DE Data Protection Officer confirmed with offices concerned that no automated/paper means was used to keep information given. Written confirmation was sent to the Registrar's office to reply to the person making the complaint.
1 February 1990 (ES)	A client complained that ES did not respond to a subject access request within 40 days (Principle 7)	Investigation showed that no request had been received. Arrangements were made to send details. No action required.
3 May 1990 (ES)	A client complained that the inclusion of his NINO in the details shown in the window of his Giro envelope warranted an unauthorised disclosure of personal information (Principle 8)	The NINO information was removed from the windows of the envelopes.
8 June 1990 (ES)	A client complained that he did not receive an answer to a subject access request (Principle 7)	Investigations showed that a reply had been sent within the required time. Further information was sent. No action required.
23 November 1990 (HSE)	A request for personal data was not immediately identified as a subject access request, and a breakdown in the administrative procedures within the personnel section delayed a response within the time limits (Principle 7)	Apology and copy of personal data sent to complainant. System managers reminded of action and time scale for dealing with subject access requests. Personnel system instructed to make changes to their administrative procedures.
24 January 1991 (ES)	A client claimed that: *(a)* He did not receive a response to a subject access request; *(b)* The printout received after a "second" request was not within the 40 days; *(c)* He was not given all his personal information; and *(d)* Said that the printout was not accompanied by an explanatory note. (Principle 7)	Investigations showed that ES had responded to his requests within required limits and given him all information that was needed. No action required.
28 January 1991 (ES)	*(Same client as 24 January 1991)* After another complaint the Register asked: *(a)* Are ES holding information for a specific period for the client? *(b)* Was this data sent to the client on request? *(c)* Why was the client given the information shown on the attached printout? (Principle 7)	Further investigations showed that ES had complied the Act. The Registrar was informed of details. No action required.
5 June 1991 (ES)	A client complained that his benefit details had been disclosed to the tutor at his "Restart" course (Principle 8)	No action required. ES were authorised to make this type of disclosure.
12 September 1991 (ES)	A client complained that an ES application form said that information would be given to "relevant organisations". This is vague. What is "relevant" and how do ES decide? (Principle 8)	No action required. "Relevant organisations' were listed in registrations. ES decided on "relevance" by giving info to companies who notified them of vacancies.
27 November 1991 (ES)	A client complained that an ES employee had found his address through unauthorised use of the ES computer system (Principle 8)	Complaint upheld – ES staff member given three-year disciplinary penalty. No action required as investigation showed that this was an isolated incident and staff were aware of their responsibilities under the Act.

Date and Part of EDG	Nature of complaint	Remedial action taken
18 December 1991 (ES)	TH[illegible]ES was asking on the subject access request form for th[illegible]P registration number. The Registrar thought that this could give the impression that ES were trying to "frustrate" rather than "facilitate" those making requests (Principle 7)	Although it was on the form we did not require the information to process a request. If the client could say where the contact was with ES that was sufficient. The form has now been amended.
6 February 1992 (ES)	A client made a subject access request and then wrote to the Registrar claiming inaccuracies in the printout. The Registrar asked for details of the client so that the claims could be checked (Principle 7)	ES sent the Registrar the requested details. Client's claims were unfounded. No action required.
5 June 1992 (ES)	A client alleged that the ES never replied to a subject access request although he was verbally told that it was being dealt with (Principle 7)	Investigations showed that no request had been received. The Registrar and ES followed up with the client, but he never responded to the letters. No action required.
23 December 1992 (ES)	A client was dissatisfied with the information given on the data protection printout. He claimed that it was incorrect, ie, it showed he was paid benefit when he was not (Principle 7)	Printout was correct. The dates concerned showed periods of signing on and not payment. No action required.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Textiles and Clothing

21. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next intends to meet representatives of the British textile and clothing industries to discuss the state of the industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no immediate plans to do so. However, my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade met representatives of the Apparel, Knitting and Textile Alliance yesterday.

One-stop Shops

22. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress with the one-stop shops initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: Six areas have been chosen to run the first pilots. The areas are Birmingham, Halton—north Cheshire—Hertfordshire, Manchester, south and east Cheshire and Tyneside. There are a further nine areas where plans are in an advanced stage. This will bring the number of one-stop shops to around 50.

I am determined that we should build on the momentum which has already been achieved and move as quickly as possible towards a full one-stop shop network.

Enterprise Initiative

23. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are his Department's plans for the development of the enterprise initiative.

Mr. Heseltine: My officials are working with the training and enterprise councils and pilot one-stop shops to develop and trial a range of new services which will build on and ultimately succeed the consultancy scheme element of the enterprise initiative package.

Heavy Electrical Goods

25. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the United Kingdom's principal export markets for heavy electrical goods.

Mr. Needham: The United Kingdom's principal markets for such goods in recent years have been the USA, Germany and other countries within the European Community. I understand that several large contracts have also been concluded recently with countries in the Pacific rim area.

Design Council

26. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the work of the regional offices of the Design Council.

Mr. Leigh: The Design Council's regional network plays an important part in ensuring that both its services to industry and its educational activities are made more accessible to firms and institutions. The one-stop shops initiative recognises the need to simplify industry's access to a variety of services, including those offered by the council.

Exports

27. **Mr. J[illegible]ques Arnold:** To ask the President of the Board of Tra[illegible]if he will make a statement on the work of his Department in promoting the exports of British goods and services to particular markets.

Mr. Needham: The Department of Trade and Industry, working jointly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, is wholly committed to helping more United Kingdom companies to win in world markets. The changes announced last week by my right hon. Friend will reinforce our efforts, and provide a clearer focus to our export promotion work. The DTI is gearing up to provide its best ever service to exporters.

Pit Closures

28. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when financial assistance to offset the consequences of colliery closures will be available in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Eggar: Details of the regeneration measures proposed for the Nottinghamshire coalfield areas were announced by the relevant Departments and agencies concerned on Thursday 13 May. The Secretary of State for

Transport also announced on 6 May support of £6·5 million from coal regeneration funds for the Robin Hood line.

34. **Mrs. Golding:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the chairman of British Coal to discuss the effects of pit closures.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and I meet the chairman of British Coal as necessary to discuss a wide range of issues concerning the coal industry.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the latest situation regarding pit closures.

Mr. Eggar: Decisions on pit closures are a matter for British Coal, after consultation with the unions.

British Coal Superannuation Scheme

28. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last met the trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme.

Mr. Eggar: I am meeting the trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme tomorrow, Thursday 20 May.

EC Product Safety Directive

30. **Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further steps he is taking to implement the EC general product safety directive in full.

Mr. Leigh: My Department intends to publish a consultation document on the implementation of this directive in the early autumn. The document will contain, and seek comments on, the draft implementing regulations. It will also contain guidance notes on the interpretation of the legislation. The timing of the next steps will depend on the outcome of the consultation, but I am confident that the United Kingdom will implement the legislation by the date laid down in the directive.

Imports

31. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in the level of imports over the last 12 months.

Mr. Needham: In 1992, the volume of imports increased by 5·9 per cent.

With the completion of the single market at the end of 1992, routine border requirements and formalities were abolished for trade within the European Community. Customs declarations—the source of trade statistics until December 1992—are no longer required. A new system is being introduced but, at present, it is not possible to provide figures for trade with the European Community for January 1993 onwards.

In the 12 months to March 1993, the volume of imports from non-EC countries increased by 8·9 per cent.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

32. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet his American counterpart to discuss further action to bring the current GATT round to a conclusion.

Mr. Heseltine: I currently have no firm plans for a further meeting with United States trade representative Kantor whom I met on 31 March.

Shareholders (Disclosure of Information)

33. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether his Department has any plans to meet the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the current regulations relating to disclosure of information to shareholders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department has regular contact with the Confederation of British Industry on company law matters.

Small Businesses (Banks' Policies)

35. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet representatives of the clearing banks to discuss their policies towards small businesses.

Mr. Leigh: Ministers in this Department have frequent meetings with representatives of the clearing banks to discuss their policies towards small businesses and we will continue to do so.

36. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he plans to meet representatives of the clearing banks in order to discuss support for small businesses.

Mr. Leigh: Ministers in this Department have frequent meetings with representatives of the clearing banks to discuss their support for small businesses and we will continue to do so.

Manufactured Goods

37. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the latest balance of trade in manufactured goods.

Mr. Needham: In 1992, the United Kingdom deficit in manufactured goods was £7·6 billion.

With the completion of the single market at the end of 1992, routine border requirements and formalities were abolished for trade within the European Community. Customs declarations—the source of trade statistics until December 1992—are no longer required. A new system is being introduced but, at present, it is not possible to provide figures for trade with the European Community for January 1993 onwards.

In the 12 months to March 1993, the United Kingdom had a deficit in manufactured goods of £5·3 billion with non-EC countries.

Non-United Kingdom Corporations

38. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many non-United Kingdom corporations operating branch plants in this country also operate major research and development establishments in this country.

Mr. Leigh: My Department's Invest in Britain Bureau is aware of 139 research and development facilities set up by overseas-owned companies in the United Kingdom. This figure is based on information provided by the

companies at the time of the announcement to invest. There is no requirement to notify the Department and so the figure includes only those projects where the Department's Invest in Britain Bureau and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. It takes no account of subsequent developments.

Company Directors (Honours)

39. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps are taken to give recognition to the contributions to public life of chairmen and managing directors of companies.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: My Department is among those which make recommendations to the Prime Minister for honours to be awarded to a wide range of individuals whose contributions in their main occupations and in voluntary service are particularly meritorious.

EC Trade Deficit

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the EC's total deficit in trade with the rest of the world in 1992; and by what percentage this figure has increased or decreased over the previous five and 10 years.

Mr. Heseltine: The latest annual data are for 1991. For 1991, the EC had a trade deficit of £49·4 billion with exports of £296·9 million and imports of £346·3 million. This compares with a surplus of £4·9 billion in 1986 and a deficit of £29·3 billion in 1981. As the trade balance moves between deficit and surplus it is inappropriate to show percentage changes.

Liverpool Airport

Mr. Parry: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet officials of the Liverpool airport to discuss developments at Speke.

Mr. Sainsbury: The President of the Board of Trade has no current plans to meet officials of Liverpool airport. Nor has any such meeting been sought.

Environmental Damage (Civil Liability)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the Council of Europe proposal for a convention on civil liabilities for environmental damage to be opened for signature in June.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply. We are currently considering this convention and will announce our policy towards it in due course.

THORP

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if it is Government policy to await the establishment of an international plutonium store before the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield is granted a licence to operate.

Mr. Eggar: No. Strict controls operate over the shipment of plutonium from United Kingdom reprocessing plants. These arrangements are quite separate from the nuclear site licence and discharge authorisations that may be required by any nuclear site. No plutonium will be shipped from Sellafield unless the Government are satisfied that it will not be misused.

British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries his Department has undertaken into financial irregularities within British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: BNFL has recently passed a file of evidence about individuals benefiting from certain BNFL maintenance contracts to the Cheshire constabulary. Any further investigation is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc and the police.

DEMOS

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the total sum paid to businesses under the DTI's environmental management options scheme since its introduction; and what plans he has for its continuance.

Mr. Eggar: Since the introduction of DEMOS in October 1990, a total of £2,677,125 has been committed to businesses for projects approved under the scheme.

The scheme was designed to run for three years and is due to end formally on 30 September 1993. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment are currently considering what future support might be appropriate to encourage innovation in environmental technology. However, at present it is too early to say what the outcome of these discussions will be.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many businesses have succeeded in their applications for funding under DEMOS 491; and how many have been refused grant.

Mr. Eggar: The DTI's environmental management options scheme (DEMOS) has attracted 602 initial first stage applications, of which 180 have been rejected, 184 withdrew their applications, eight transferred to other schemes and 28 were asked to provide further information, but did not reply.

Two hundred and two projects have been invited to submit more detailed second stage proposals under DEMOS. Of the 66 that have submitted these proposals, 16 projects have been funded, with grants being committed to 31 businesses. In addition, some of these projects will involve the collaboration of organisations that will not receive DEMOS funding, such as local authorities. Forty-three of the projects which submitted second stage proposals were rejected.

The remainder of those invited to the second stage have either withdrawn or transferred to other schemes.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of businesses funded under DEMOS 491 showing the amount of grant paid.

Mr. Eggar: Two hundred and two projects have been invited to submit a more detailed second stage proposal under DEMOS. Of those that have submitted these proposals, 13 projects have been funded, with grants being committed to the following business:

Companies awarded DEMOS grant	*Grant*
British Textile Technology Group	40,000
Zinc Development Association	7,250
Textile Finishers Association	10,686
PW Greenhaulgh and Co. Ltd.	33,578
Tack Lea Works Ltd.	33,578
CV Woven Fabrics Ltd.	33,578
CV Home Furnishings Ltd.	33,578
Expitaxial Products International Ltd.	42,476
Edwards High Vacuum International Ltd.	79,389
Repak Ltd.	258,281
Yorkshire Electricity	8,100
Fosse Ltd.	264,000
T and D Ltd.	15,000
Bridgewater Paper Company Ltd.	2,500
Metal Finishers Association	5,000
Tame Valley Alloys Ltd.	309,256
Air Products plc	28,570
Environmental Air Filtration Ltd.	16,835
Drinkwater Sabey Ltd.	283,000
WS Atkins Consultants Ltd.	245,300
Motherwell Bridge Envirotec Ltd.	141,786
Environmental Energy Ltd.	15,730
South West Water plc	409,000
TOTAL	2,325,471

There are an additional three projects consisting of eight businesses which have also been offered grants amounting to £351,654. However, as the applicants have not yet formally accepted the offers, information on these companies is currently commercially confidential.

National Consumer Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will meet the National Consumer Council to discuss its proposals relating to international trade.

Mr. Needham: I will be arranging a meeting with the National Consumer Council to discuss its proposals on international trade.

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many patent applications have been received since 1985 for new microbes, plants and animals containing altered genes; what they were for; and which ones were approved.

Mr. Leigh: Patent applications in the field of genetic engineering invariably involve modification of the host. Microbes are, by far, the most common form of host, and it would be disproportionately expensive to ascertain the precise number. The number of applications relating to plants and animals is far fewer. There have been six published applications relating to plants, on which patent have been granted for five. These relate to the introduction of self-pollinating characteristics, herbicide resistance, disease resistance and male sterility. There have been seven published applications relating to animals, patents having been granted on three. These relate to sheep which produce stronger wool, genetically identical cattle and the introduction of genes to produce therapeutic proteins. This investigation has been restricted to those applications filed under the Patents Act 1977 which have proceeded at least to publication.

Benefits (Automatic Transfer)

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many post offices his Department expects to close if DSS payments, including pensions, are changed to automatic credit transfer; and if he will make a statement on the trial currently being undertaken.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* Government policy is to encourage the take-up of ACT on a voluntary basis. We do not expect that this policy will lead to post office closures. Three different versions of the retirement pension claim form were piloted by the Benefits Agency and the results of their trial are being assessed at present.

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations he has had with the chief executive of the Post Office concerning future plans for payment of social security benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* Both my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and I meet the chief executive of the Post Office from time to time to discuss a wide range of issues.

Technology and Innovation

Mr. Hain: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will provide figures for expenditure for his Department for *(a)* technology transfer and *(b)* industrial innovation (i) for the past five years and (ii) as projected for the next three years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Details of expenditure by the Department of Trade and Industry in the categories requested are available from the Cabinet Office's annual review of Government-funded research and development 1991 and 1992. The figures are:

£ million

	Outturn			*Estimate*	*Provision*	*Plans*		
	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*	[2] *1995-96*
Technology Transfer								
DTI[1]	96·4	90·2	103·4	92·5	94·2	92·3	85·9	—
Former DEn	9·6	9·0	12·3	10·5	12·5	14·3	15·4	—
	106·0	99·2	115·7	103·0	106·7	106·6	101·3	—
Industrial Innovation[1]	94·3	74·5	67·6	82·0	85·9	92·3	104·5	—

[1] Figures relate to DTI expenditure plans prior to April 1992 before the (partial) merger with the former Department of Energy.
[2] Figures for 1995-96 will be published in the 1993 annual review shortly.

Vista UDM

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions have taken place between British Coal's head of mine service centres and Vista UDM regarding maintenance contracts for proposed recycling plants at Silverhill and Cotgrave collieries.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* This is a matter for the parties concerned.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make a statement on the proposed takeover of British Coal collieries by Vista UDM;

(2) how his Department has been involved in discussions with Vista UDM or British Coal on the future of the mine service centres at Shafton, Bestwood, Tursdale and Ashington.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* This is a matter for British Coal. I welcome any serious proposals to take over collieries which British Coal no longer wishes to operate. I know that Vista UDM is in discussions with British Coal over the proposals and I have also met Vista UDM to hear about its proposals.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions have taken place between William Hayes, the head of British Coal's mine service centres, and Vista UDM regarding work for Bestwood and Tursdale mine service centres.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* This is a matter for the parties concerned.

Coal Industry

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to receive a copy of the report commissioned by British Coal on the future of the four mine service centres.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* This is a matter for British Coal.

Mr. Illsley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the future of British Coal's mine service centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The Government have received a number of representations concerning the future of mine service centres.

DEFENCE

Jungle Training

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to the British Army of jungle training in *(a)* Belize and *(b)* Borneo in the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Costs of jungle training in Belize are not separately identifiable from the overall costs of the garrison without disproportionate cost. No jungle training takes place in Borneo, but the costs of jungle training in Brunei, not including travel, were £2,300,000 in 1989-90, £1,900,000 in 1990-91 and £2,300,000 in 1991-92.

Armaments Orders

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has placed with SPEL and EXPRA in Portugal for armaments since 1979.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has no records of placing any contracts with either of these companies in the last three years. Records for previous years could be checked only at disproportionate cost.

Consar

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has placed with Consar of Italy since 1979.

Mr. Aitken: My Department has no records of placing any contracts with this company in the last three years. Records for previous years could be checked only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to publish information relating to emergency contingency plans in the event of a nuclear weapons transport accident in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Such information was provided in December 1992 in a document entitled "Local Authority and Emergency Service Information on Nuclear Weapon Transport Contingency Plans" which has been distributed to all civil emergency services and local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who his representatives are at the New York preparatory conference on 10 to 14 May for the 1993 international review of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department was represented at the preparatory committee for the 1995 conference of the parties to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons by two officials from the defence arms control unit.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are to be made to enable all holders of the Atlantic Star to participate in the march past being held in Liverpool to commemorate the battle of the Atlantic.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Arrangements for the battle of the Atlantic march past in Liverpool have been co-ordinated by the Royal Naval Association—in conjunction with Army and RAF veterans' associations—in the case of ex-service personnel, and by the Chamber of Shipping, in the case of merchant seamen. Any veterans who have not been contacted by these or other veterans' organisations and who wish to join the march past may, either as individuals or as representatives of groups, apply to the "drop-in centre" at Cunard building, Liverpool during the mornings of 16 to 28 May. Places will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis after fitness to march has been assessed.

Empty Properties, Biggin Hill

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, columns *457-58*, on residential properties at Biggin Hill, what is the total housing stock belonging to his Department at Biggin Hill; and if those being sold have been offered to housing associations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department owns a total of 145 residential properties at Biggin Hill. A one-year lease on the 73 surplus properties was offered to housing associations but was not taken up. The properties are now being marketed and housing associations will be invited to bid for them.

Helicopters Landing Platform

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects work to start on the recently ordered landing platform for helicopters; and when he expects the vessel to be in operation with the Royal Navy.

Mr Aitken: Design work on the LPH commenced with the award of contract. Fabrication of the vessel is due to begin in the middle of next year with acceptance from the shipbuilder due in 1997. The ship will become operational in early 1998 following a period of trials.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 20 May 1993

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Scientific Research (Russia)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assistance the United Kingdom has offered the Russian Scientific Research Institute of Organic Chemistry and Technology in Moscow.

Mr. Waldegrave: British scientists have long had contacts with scientists at the Institute of Organic Chemistry in Moscow, which comes under the Russian Academy of Sciences department of general and technical chemistry. These contacts have developed through assistance for Russian science funded by the Office of Science and Technology and administered through the Royal Society. As an example, Dr. Rakitin of the Moscow institute was awarded a three-month Kapitza fellowship beginning in November 1992 at the department of chemistry, Imperial college, London, in order to initiate United Kingdom/Russia collaboration in the synthesis and chemistry of heterocyclic systems of great importance to the fine chemicals industry.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mediation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the percentage of cases in which mediation leads to an outcome which is more satisfactory to those involved than that of a confrontation in court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has welcomed the growth of private mediation services and he is considering ways in which such services can contribute to his aims of reducing cost, complexity and delay in civil litigation. It is important that alternative methods of dispute resolution, whether inside or outside the court, provide scope to tailor procedures more closely to the needs of disputants. Work at this stage is concentrating on defining these differing needs, rather than attempting to assess accurately disputants' "satisfaction".

Mr. Michael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the effect of local community mediation services on reducing *(a)* the cost of legal aid and *(b)* time spent in court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Any alternative methods of resolving disputes which are more economical for the taxpayer, while being speedier and simpler to use by parties to a dispute, would be welcomed. The effect of the introduction of a new system of dispute resolution on the cost of legal aid is something that would have to be considered when developing and implementing a new scheme. As many of the disputes referred to community mediation would not, otherwise, have reached the courts, it is not possible to assess reliably the effect on court time of such services.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Falklands

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Defence of 29 March, *Official Report*, columns *15-16*, if he will make a statement on the current state of his consideration of the conduct of British troops in the Falklands in 1992.

The Attorney-General: The investigation referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 29 March 1993 is continuing. The Director of Public Prosecutions will consider what action, if any, is appropriate once the investigation is completed.

TRANSPORT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Norris: In response to this question, my Department (including its agencies) has obtained information from the Office of the Data Protection Registrar as follows:

a total of 40 complaints have been received.

these complaints are categorised in the Annex according to the Principles set out in the Registrar's Guideline No. 4 booklet.

None has led to a request from the Registrar for any remedial action.

In the time available, the additional information requested could be provided only at disproportionate expense.

Sustainable Development Report

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking and what instructions he has given to prepare a draft paper as a basis for his Department's contribution to the sustainable development report.

Mr. MacGregor: Preparation of the sustainable development report is being co-ordinated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My officials are currently discussing with the Department of the Environment the format of a consultation paper, which we hope will focus public debate about the preparation of a United Kingdom sustainable development plan.

Rail Freight

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his proposals for the privatisation of the British Railways Board's freight businesses.

Mr. MacGregor: I have today published a document, "Rail Freight Privatisation—The Government's Proposals", which sets out the Government's plans to restructure British Rail's existing freight businesses for privatisation. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and in the Vote Office.

The key proposals are: to split British Rail's existing trainload businesses into three geographical companies for transfer to private sector ownership; to establish the channel tunnel freight business on a sound commercial footing with the aim of privatisation as soon as possible; to invite proposals from the private sector on the future of the Freightliner domestic and deep-sea container business; and to privatise Rail Express Systems, which carries Royal Mail letter traffic, as soon as practicable.

The combination of privatisation and open access to the railway network will promote the development of a rail freight industry which is efficient, competitive and responsive to customers' needs.

Railway Pensions

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has reached final conclusions on the future arrangements for railway pensions after privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have now completed my consultations about the future of railway pensions. I have had very helpful discussions with representatives of pensioners and of contributing members to the railway pension scheme, with the trustees, with the trade unions and with the Railways Board.

My objective remains to preserve the security of rights enjoyed by pensioners and members while adopting arrangements to suit the new structure of the privatised industry. The proposals I am announcing today meet this objective.

I have decided that there should be set up, under the powers granted in the Railways Bill, a joint industry pension scheme for the railways. This will be broadly on the basis set out in the consultation paper "Railway Pensions after Privatisation" issued in January. The governance and administration of the joint industry scheme will continue to involve both the employers and employees in the industry. We shall be discussing the detailed arrangements with interested parties. The eventual arrangements will need to reflect the recommendations of the pensions law review committee chaired by Professor Goode.

Existing employees' rights will be protected by statutory orders made under the Railways Bill. The benefits offered to employees must be no less favourable than those in the existing scheme. There will be no penalties for involuntary breaks in employment. The present schemes under which the employer matches additional voluntary contributions made by employees (BRASS schemes) will continue subject to the existing right of the employer to withdraw matching for new or increased contributions.

Employees should be reassured by the statutory protection of these benefits. But I now propose to go further and give those staff serving at Royal Assent an individual right to remain in the joint industry scheme for as long as they are still employed in the railway industry. An amendment to the Bill to secure this "indefeasible" right—on which representatives have placed great importance—will be brought forward in another place.

There will in addition be specific safeguards, in franchise contracts, to cover the transfer of pension funds when a franchise changes hands.

In our consultation paper we proposed two possible broad approaches to arrangements for existing pensioners. Option 2 would have involved an appropriate portion of each fund being transferred to the Government, in return for guaranteed index-linked pensions. There was very little support for this option in the consultation. The Government have decided not to proceed with it.

Instead, Option 1, a closed scheme for railway pensioners with appropriate support by investment, will be set up in due course, which will enable them to participate in any future surpluses there may be. We shall discuss with the trustees and the board the timetable for establishing this scheme taking account of the need to have clear arrangements in place as soon as possible. But we recognise the trustees' need for time to rearrange their investments to secure the pensions of their members. Meanwhile, the pensioners will continue in the BR scheme with the board's remaining employees. Again in response to points made in consultation, I am content for the pensioners' closed scheme to be managed as part of the joint industry scheme, provided that its governance arrangements are satisfactory. This will require further discussion and will again need to reflect the outcome of the Goode committee's recommendations.

The division of funds between sections of the joint industry scheme and any new schemes will take into account the liabilities of those schemes, and the decisions made by the trusteees following the 1990 actuarial valuation, to improve pension benefits and to reduce contribution rates. The calculations will be subject to independent actuarial advice. These calculations will be carried out in the light of the present valuation of the fund, which is expected to be completed in the autumn.

The Government will continue to make the contributions to BR pension funds fixed by the Transport Act 1980. The necessary amendments to the 1980 Act to make this possible have been put down for discussion at Report stage.

Orders for setting up new schemes, transferring funds and protection of existing employees will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure in both Houses. Orders relating to schemes and funds will be the subject of statutory consultation with the trustees.

It is both natural and right that pensioners, pension scheme members and trustees should express their concerns and seek reassurance about pension arrangements in the privatised railway. The consultation document gave them the opportunity to do so: these decisions address those concerns and provide that reassurance.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he plans to the coastguard service in north Devon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Steven Norris: No changes to the coastguard service in north Devon are planned other than those already implemented over the last 12 months under the coastal review.

Selby Bypass

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost, on completion, of the Selby bypass project now in train; and how much approximately has so far been spent on the project on design work, soil surveys and public inquiries, etcetera.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The current estimated cost of the Selby bypass is £19 million.

The readily available information shows that £0·8 million has been spent since 1988 in respect of design work, soil surveys and public inquiries.

Applications for Orders

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what applications he has received in respect of section 6 of the Transport and Works Act 1992, stating for each the date received, the applicant and the nature of the scheme or works and where the public may obtain copies; and what arrangements exist for notifying hon. Members.

Mr. Freeman: None. One application has been made to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of cooling works for a proposed generating station at South Humber Bank. This was received on 19 April from Humber Power Limited. The draft order disapplies section 6 of the Humber Conservancy Act 1905 in regard to works which are subject to separate consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. Copies of the application are available for inspection free of charge at the county hall, Humberside county council, and the civic offices, Cleethorpes borough council. The guide to the new procedures places the responsibility on applicants to notify hon. Members with a constituency interest of applications. In this case I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) has been notified of the application.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Seats, Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Boundary Commission will begin its review of parliamentary seats in Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that a decision will be made on this matter once an appointment has been made to fill the post of deputy chairman of the Boundary Commission for Wales.

Replica Guns

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is considering taking against the misuse of replica guns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has accepted the advice offered to him by the firearms consultative committee that the range of offences which apply to the misuse of imitation firearms should be extended. This will be implemented at a suitable legislative opportunity.

Child Deaths

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions during the last five years following the death of a child charges have been brought under *(a)* section 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and *(b)* sections 18 and/or 20 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861; and what sentences, on conviction, were imposed in each case.

Mr. Jack: Information in the form requested is not collected centrally.

Litter Offences

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what proportion of the prosecutions brought under the Litter Act 1983 during the most recent period for which statistics are available was successful;

(2) what was the average fine imposed under the Litter Act 1983 during the most recent period for which statistics are available.

Mr. Jack: In England and Wales in 1991 there were 1,450 prosecutions under the Litter Act 1983. Eighty-three per cent. (1,199) of those proceeded against were convicted. The average fine imposed was £55.

Data for 1992 will not be available until the autumn.

Royal Family (Bugging)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all occasions where he has given interviews this year to the media on allegations of the bugging of the royal family by security or intelligence services; and if he will place in the Library copies of the available transcripts of his comments on this matter.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I gave interviews to the BBC on Wednesday 12 and Thursday 13 May. If the hon. Member wishes to obtain transcripts he should contact the BBC. I was also questioned about this subject, among others, at a press conference in Edinburgh on 12 May but I cannot provide a transcript of my answers there.

Burglaries

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries have been committed within each police authority area of Wales in each year from 1987; how many have been convicted of burglary in each year; and, of those convicted, how many were registered or unregistered drug addicts at the time of the burglaries.

Mr. Jack: The information available relates to the recorded offences of burglary in Wales and persons convicted of such offences. A table showing these data is given below. Information on how many convicted burglars are registered or unregistered drug addicts is not available centrally.

Recorded burglaries and persons convicted of burglary by Welsh police force area 1987 to 1992

Wales

Police force	1987		1988		1989		1990		1991		1992	
	Recorded offences	Persons convicted	Recorded offences	Persons convicted	Recorded offences	Persons convicted	Recorded offences	Persons convicted	Recorded offences	Persons convicted	Recorded offences	Persons convicted
Dyfed-Powys	2,942	364	3,214	288	2,721	296	3,419	341	4,696	370	5,100	[1]—
Gwent	4,804	621	4,170	530	3,838	477	5,235	564	7,477	530	8,239	[1]—
North Wales	9,955	737	8,837	635	7,387	551	8,342	576	10,184	553	12,472	[1]—
South Wales	26,493	1,765	25,158	1,443	25,067	1,366	28,121	1,477	36,637	1,610	38,799	[1]—
Total for Wales	44,194	3,487	41,379	2,896	39,013	2,690	45,117	2,958	58,994	3,063	64,610	[1]—

[1] Not available yet

Female Prisons (Complaints against Male Staff)

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many male staff members in each of the female prisons has been subject to official complaint for sexual misconduct in each of the past five years; and in how many cases formal disciplinary action was taken.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Mr. D. Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 20 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about complaints of sexual misconduct made against male staff working in women's prisons in each of the past five years.

Complaints of harassment or other sexual misconduct, whether made by members of staff or inmates, are dealt with in the first instance at the establishment. If formal disciplinary charges are brought, they may be resolved at the establishment under powers delegated to the governor. Not all records of such cases are retained locally; in fairness to the accused, papers relating to complaints which are dismissed or where the accused in found innocent are destroyed. Only those cases which merit a punishment beyond the scope of the governor's powers would be referred to Headquarters. Cases of proven sexual misconduct would almost certainly fall into this category but we do not have any records which would enable us to state how many such cases had been referred to us in the past five years.

A Notice to Staff on sexual harassment was issued in 1992 and we have since mid-1991 kept informal records of complaints of sexual (and racial) harassment which are referred to us by area managers, governors and other colleagues. These include complaints by both staff and inmates. We have been able to identify two complaints against male members of staff at women's establishments. In 1991, one complaint of sexual harassment against a male principal officer resulted in a written warning. In 1992 a complaint of sexual harassment against a storeman was found not to be substantiated.

Further details of other complaints could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Drugs (Confiscation of Assets)

Mr. Mudie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was returned to the Treasury under the confiscation powers of *(a)* the Drug Trafficking Act 1986 and *(b)* the Criminal Justice Act 1988 in each financial year since their commencement.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the table:

Amount (£) recovered[1] by the Secretary of State in confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 by financial year

England and Wales

Year	Amount recovered £
Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986[2]	
1987-88	} 600,000
1988-89	
1989-90[3]	1,375,200
1990-91[3]	1,448,000
1991-92	5,384,500
Criminal Justice Act 1988[4]	
1989-90[3]	353,700
1990-91[3]	437,100
1991-92	59,400

[1] The information collected centrally is known to be incomplete as returns were not received from all petty sessional divisions.

[2] Came into force January 1987.

[3] There was some confusion with the recording of information regarding the two Acts during these years. In consequence it is considered that data has been under recorded for the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and over recorded from the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

[4] Came into force April 1989.

Identity Cards

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration his Department has given to the introduction by banks of photo-identity bank cards with a tamper-proof, laser-etched signature as a possible model for the introduction of a universal photo-identity card scheme in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: The introduction of photographs on cheque and credit cards was recommended in the Home Office crime prevention unit paper 26, "Preventing Cheque and Credit Card Fraud", which was published in 1991. I understand, however, that although some banks and building societies have now introduced such cards, including laser-engraved signatures, there is not general agreement among the financial institutions that these provide the most effective way of combatting the problem of fraud.

The particular technical solutions adopted to tackle cheque and credit card fraud must be a commercial decision which lies with the banks and the retail sector. The Home Office will, however, continue to do what it can to encourage full co-operation and communication between all those bodies which have an interest in tackling this problem.

The introduction of an identity card scheme is a separate issue, and one which is kept under review. However, the Government are not at present persuaded

that the benefits of issuing identity cards outweigh the disadvantages and costs. The question of possible models does not therefore arise.

Market Testing

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the applicability of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 to any future Home Office market testing exercise will be included in relevant documentation as a condition of contract.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No. The regulations form part of a statutory instrument and, if applicable, take effect and are enforceable without the need for them to be included in a condition of contract.

Unit Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his estimate of the proportion of cases in which an inappropriate fine given under the unit fine system was *(a)* too high and *(b)* too low;

(2) what is his estimate of the total number of cases in which an inappropriate fine was given under the unit fines system.

Mr. Jack: I have no basis on which to make any such estimate.

Actual fine levels imposed are the responsibility of sentencers.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he had with the Justices Clerks Society on proposals for reforming the unit fine system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Following the implementation of the unit fine system on 1 October 1992, officials in my Department had a number of discussions with representatives of the Justices Clerks Society about the way in which the scheme was operating and, latterly, about ways in which it might be modified. But, as my right hon. and learned Friend indicated in his statement on 13 May, his conclusion was that the better course was to abolish the scheme altogether. He has since then (17 May) met representatives of the society.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notifiable criminal offences took place in Devon and Cornwall in 1992; and if he will publish separate figures for *(a)* violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery, *(d)* burglary, *(e)* theft and handling of stolen goods, *(f)* fraud and forgery, *(g)* criminal damage and *(h)* other offences.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is given in the following table:

Notifiable offences recorded by the policy by offence group
Devon and Cornwall

Offence group	*1992*
Violence against the person	3,926
Sexual offences	665
Robbery	310
Burglary	28,728
Theft and handling stolen goods	60,658
Fraud and forgery	3,601
Criminal damage	15,936
Other offences	851
Total	114,675

Drug Smuggling

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many front-line customs staff have been employed on anti-drug smuggling duties in the United Kingdom and its waters during each of the last five years.

Sir John Cope: I have been asked to reply.

Front-line resources devoted specifically to passenger and transport control by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise over the past five years are set out in table 1. This is not restricted to drugs enforcement because Customs' frontier controls encompass a number of prohibitions and restrictions. Other staff also contribute to the anti-smuggling effort, including specialist investigators, staff employed on freight and documentary processing and essential support services such as training and prosecutions. Table 2 shows a broad estimate of the total resource devoted to the anti-drugs effort, including such staff.

Table 1
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise
Front-line resources devoted to passenger and transport control

	Staff years
1988-89	3,600
1989-90	3,637
1990-91	3,630
1991-92	3,558
1992-93	3,420

Table 2
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise
Resources devoted to anti-drugs effort

	Staff years
1988-89	4,700
1989-90	4,950
1990-91	4,850
1991-92	4,800
1992-93	5,000

Note: Resources are counted in staff years rather than staff numbers, to take account of such factors as part-time working and overtime.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Eggs

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will bring forward legislation to ensure that eggs from battery hens are labelled to make that clear.

Mr. Curry: The EC Egg Marketing Standards Regulations lay down the terms which may be used to describe egg production systems. The terms include "free

range" and "perchery (barn)" eggs. Further descriptions are not required by those EC regulations and are not considered necessary.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from farmers on the effect of ploughing up land with the aim of discouraging illegal encampments on elibigility for set-aside payments in respect of that land.

Mr. Curry: None. Set-aside fields can be ploughed to create a bare fallow from 1 May. Requests for an exemption from the management rules to plough the margin of a set-aside field earlier than this to help prevent illegal access have been treated sympathetically.

Integrated Administration and Control

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the timetable of processing IACS forms at each of his Department's regional centres and when he expects all forms at each centre to be accepted for grant eligibility.

Mr. Curry: Each regional service centre will now undertake a detailed check of the IACS forms to determine eligibility for aid. These checks have already begun. We shall aim to have the checks completed as quickly as possible, having regard to the time payments are due under the individual schemes involved.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what total cost he estimates for the administration of the integrated administration and control system by his Department in 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Curry: Our best estimate is that administration of IACS in England will cost in the region of £7 million in 1993-94 and £5 million in 1994-95.

Strawberries (Destruction)

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will raise with his French counterpart the question of compensation for Mr. Russell Temple for the destruction of a quantity of Spanish strawberries near Bordeaux while en route to England.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I have been asked to reply.

Her Majesty's embassy in Paris has already protested to the French authorities about the destruction of a consignment of strawberries which one of Mr. Temple's lorries was carrying near Bordeaux; they agree that he has a strong case for compensation. We shall be in touch with Mr. Temple.

Agricultural Grants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications for subsidy or grant made before 11 February remained unpaid on 11 May in the region of the United Kingdom covering the north of England.

Mr. Curry: The processing of claims under many MAFF schemes follows an annual cycle. On 11 May, the position at the northern regional service centre at Carlisle was as follows:

Since it opened on 26 January, the 1993 hill livestock compensatory allowance scheme had attracted 4,562 claims of which 4,000 had been paid. Of 3,411 claims for suckler cow premium submitted by 15 December, 2,962 had been paid. The remainder were subject to outstanding inquiries. A total of 7,200 claims for sheep annual premium submitted by 5 March 1993 awaited processing.

A total of 609 applications to participate in the Lake District environmentally sensitive area had been received since its launch on 22 January and were with ADAS for the preparation of detailed agreements.

In the month of April 157 applications for capital grant schemes or payments were received and 178 were processed. The number in course of processing on 30 April was 227, of which 11 had been received before 11 February.

We have made clear in our service standard publication, "Commitment to Service", that applications for grants and subsidies will be dealt with as swiftly as possible and we set out our targets under a number of schemes. We are currently extending our monitoring systems so that we can check more closely performance against these targets.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what has been the increase in real output of the United Kingdom tourist industry in each year since 1986; what effect the decline in the nominal exchange rate since September 1992 has had on bookings for this year; and if he will publish his forecast for the industry's real output this year and next.

Mr. Key: The information on output is not available in the form requested. The Department does not collect data on bookings and so cannot quantify the effect of the depreciation of sterling since September 1992; however, it will have made the United Kingdom a more competitive tourism destination.

The British Tourist Authority forecasts that the number of overseas visits will rise by 5 per cent. in 1993 and by a further 6 per cent. in 1994. Spending by overseas visitors is expected to rise by 4 per cent. (in cash terms) in 1993, and by a further 4 per cent. in 1994. The English tourist board forecasts that the number of domestic tourism trips of one night or more will rise by 1½ per cent. in both 1993 and 1994. Spending on domestic tourism trips is expected to rise by 7 per cent. (in cash terms) in 1993 and by a further 5½ per cent. in 1994.

Arts

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the Government's activities in the field of the arts since 1987.

Mr. Brooke: The Government aim to create the conditions which enable the arts to flourish. This is now the responsibility of my Department, the creation of which indicates the priority that the Government place both on the arts and on the other areas for which it carries responsibility. Most of the Department's funding for the arts is channelled through the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB); decisions on funding arts organisations

are taken by ACGB at arm's length from Government. Grant-in-aid for the ACGB has risen from £139·3 million in 1987-88 to £225·6 million in 1993-94, an increase of 16 per cent. in real terms.

EDUCATION

Humanities Research

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements he is considering for the funding of humanities research.

Mr. Boswell: The Government have considered carefully the appropriate framework for supporting humanities research, in the light of the Follett report and of the debate in another place on 17 February.

The Government support humanities research primarily through the higher education funding councils (HEFCs), which have allocated some £90 million research funding for the humanities for the 1993-94 academic year. It also funds the British Academy to provide postgraduate and senior research awards and support research activities and facilities in the humanities: the Department for Education's grant to the academy for the 1993-94 financial year is some £22 million (an increase of 11 per cent. over the previous year).

For research in the humanities the most important resources are the time of individual scholars, and library and other collections. For the humanities these are supported almost entirely through the HEFCs' institutional grant, as are permanent academic salaries in the sciences. The Higher Education Funding Council for England is undertaking a review of library provision. The Government do not believe that humanities research would be strengthened by reducing reliance on the HEFCs' institutional grant as the means of supporting academic salaries and research collections.

Since the major channel for Government funding for humanities research will continue to be the HEFCs, the Government has concluded that the responsibility for promoting and funding it should remain with the Education Departments. This will allow the Office of Science and Technology to focus on its core responsibilities.

The Government have also concluded that a research council established to manage the appropriate proportion of the resources available to humanities research would not be viable. The Government consider, moreover, that the direction and consolidation of research that the existing research councils provide would not be appropriate in the humanities.

The Government believe that the existing structures for supporting humanities research, operating through the HEFCs and the British Academy, are best suited to meeting the particular needs of research in the humanities, and will continue to support high quality research in these disciplines in the United Kingdom.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools which have voted in favour of becoming grant-maintained are waiting for their applications to be accepted by his Department.

Mr. Forth: There are 166 schools whose proposals for self-governing (grant-maintained) status are currently under consideration in the Department. A further 87 have voted in favour of applying for self-governing status but have yet to publish proposals.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list all those organisations which have been approved by his Department as registered grant-maintained school auditors under the CIPFA scheme of audit regulation approved by his Department on 18 January.

Mr. Forth: Self-governing state schools (grant-maintained) are required to have an external audit of their accounts undertaken annually by one of the following: the Audit Commission; members of one of the professional accountancy bodies which are recognised supervisory bodies and who are also registered to audit limited companies in accordance with the companies legislation; or people or members of any other body approved by the Department of Trade and Industry to audit limited companies or approved by the Department of Education to audit grant-maintained schools.

This Department has approved the CIPFA scheme of audit registration for this purpose but, as with the other professional bodies who can audit grant-maintained schools, is not responsible for approving the individuals or organisations applying for registration. That is a matter for the professional bodies concerned, who both register and monitor the auditors.

I understand that the CIPFA has registered the following bodies under its scheme for the audit of grant-maintained schools:

Surrey county council
Dudley metropolitan borough council
Hampshire county council
Norfolk county council
London borough of Croydon
Derbyshire county council
Bedfordshire county council
Dorset county council
Hertfordshire county council
Lincolnshire county council
Nottinghamshire county council
Kent county council
Cambridgeshire county council
Gloucestershire county council
Northamptonshire county council

The requirements for external audits of grant-maintained schools are specified in an audit code issued by this Department. This includes an obligation on schools to notify the Department of the auditors they appoint.

School Tests

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the publication, or otherwise, of the results of key stage 1 and 3 tests in schools this year; and what percentage of schools he expects to carry out these tests.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend intends to publish national curriculum test results in school performance tables this year. The primary tables will show the proportion of seven-year-old pupils in each primary school reaching or exceeding the level expected of a typical seven-year-old—level 2—in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and in reading. The secondary performance tables will show the proportion of 14-year-olds in each secondary school reaching or exceeding the level expected of a typical 14-year-old—level

6—in mathematics and science. School results in English will not be published until 1994. My right hon. Friend has said that he will decide whether tests for 14-year-olds in technology should take place in 1994 in the light of this year's tests.

My right hon. Friend also intends to publish both national and local analyses of the results of key stage one and three tests in England this autumn, although he has made clear that the local analyses will not include the results of the tests of 14-year-olds in English and technology.

My right hon. Friend has repeatedly said that this summer's tests should be administered in the interest of pupils and in order to learn lessons for the future.

Students

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total full-time equivalent number of students in higher education, postgraduate and undergraduate, from the United Kingdom and EC, in each year from 1980 to the most recent year available.

Mr. Boswell: Total full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers of United Kingdom and EC domiciled[1] higher education students in Great Britain institutions are shown in the table:

Year	*FTE*[2] *(thousands)*
1980	542·7
1981	570·5
1982	587·8
1983	603·6
1984	612·4
1985	624·1
1986	642·1
1987	655·4
1988	678·6
1989	724·8
1990	785·3
1991	880·6

[1] Includes a small number of non-EC overseas domiciled part-time students.

[2] An illustrative weight of 0·35 has been applied to part-time students to derive full-time equivalent student numbers.

Sources: USR, FESR, WO, SOED.

Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what consideration he has given, in connection with considering the potential membership of the proposed Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority, to the reasons given by Lord Skidelsky and Dr. John Marenbon for their resignations from the School Examinations and Assessment Council.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend regrets the resignations of Lord Skidelsky and Dr. Marenbon from SEAC, and is aware of the reasons they gave. When considering the appointment of members to the proposed SCAA he will take account of relevant comments made to him from all sources.

Charters

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress he has made in issuing charters for further and higher education.

Mr. Patten: I have today issued the charters for further and higher education as consultative documents. I am seeking the views of a number of organisations including the representative bodies of universities and colleges before publishing the final documents in the autumn. Copies of the charters have been placed in the Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is consulting on charters for Wales.

EMPLOYMENT

Defence Work

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to encourage the allocation of defence work and related employment to the north of England and Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement on Friday 14 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *603*.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about her Department since April 1989; and how many have been accepted.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Select Committee has published 14 reports since April 1989. The Government's responses are contained in the following table. Copies of the documents are available in the Library.

Employment Select Committee reports

Report number	*Title and date published*	*Government response*
1992-93 Session		
First report	Employment in the Horseracing Industry and the new VAT regime after 1 January 1993 (16 December 1992)	Second Special report HC 521
Second report	Employment Consequences of British Coal's Proposed Pit Closures (21 January 1993)	Third Special report HC 597
1991-92 Session		
First report	Employment in Prisons for Ex-offenders (28 November 1991)	CM 1837 March 1992
Second report	Industrial Change: Retraining and Redeployment (7 May 1992)	First Special report HC 219

Report number	Title and date published	Government response
1990-91 Session		
First report	Disability and Employment (Typescript 20 December 1990 HMSO)	No Special report published—letter sent by Secretary of State 15 January 1991
Second report	Recruitment Practices (20 February 1991)	Departmental Memorandum sent 19 April 1991
Third report	Future Prospects for Levels of Employment and Unemployment (5 June 1991)	Second Special report HC 675
Fourth report	The European Community Social Charter (20 August 1991)	Third Special report HC 676
Fifth report	Training and Enterprise Councils and Vocational Training (20 August 1991)	Fourth Special report HC 677
1989-90 Session		
First report	Legionnaires' Disease: Further Developments (25 January 1990)	First Special report HC 428
Second report	Part-time work (31 January 1990)	Second Special report HC 485
Third report	Employment Training (11 June 1990)	Third Special report HC 643
Fourth report	Tourism (25 July 1990)	Fourth Special report HC 668
1988-89 Session		
Second report	The Employment Patterns of the Over 50's (9 May 1989)	Fourth Special report HC 581

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make it her policy to amend the qualifying conditions for unfair dismissal set out in the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 to enable a claim for unfair dismissal to be pursued by a woman dismissed because of her pregnancy at any stage between conception and the end of maternity leave.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, contains provisions which will make it automatically unfair for an employer to dismiss an employee on maternity-related grounds during the period of her pregnancy or statutory maternity leave. This protection will apply regardless of the employee's length of service or hours of work.

PRIME MINISTER

Government Priorities

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what priorities have been set for Her Majesty's Government between now and the beginning of the summer adjournment.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 14 January 1993 at columns *786-87*.

Policy Objectives, London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what are Her Majesty's Government's short-term, medium-term and long-term policy objectives for London.

The Prime Minister: Our policy objectives are to maintain and enhance London's position as a thriving national capital and a leading world city.

Council of Ministers (Votes)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what advice has been given to all Departments concerning the recording of answers to be published in the *Official Report* to parliamentary questions of all votes in meetings of the EC's Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: All Departments are being advised that statements to the House following meetings of the Council of Ministers should include details of the vote, whenever a formal vote is taken in Council, or should record that no formal votes were taken.

Correspondence (Journalists)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what guidelines he has issued governing official correspondence between civil servants and journalists; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None. Guidance on various points concerning relations between civil servants and journalists is given in "A Working Guide for Government Information Officers" produced by the information officer management unit in the Office of Public Service and Science, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Engagements

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 20 May.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Yugoslavia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the total amount of UNHCR humanitarian aid reaching Bosnia-Herzegovina during the last two months originating from *(a)* the Republic of Croatia and *(b)* the Republic of Serbia; how much of that aid arrived by road to each destination; and how much by air.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The most recent figures available from UNHCR show that in February a total of 17,653 tonnes were delivered to Bosnia-Herzegovina, 24,330 tonnes were delivered in March and 6,131 tonnes in the first half of April. Most of this aid was delivered by road from UNHCR's distribution centres in Metkovic, Zagreb and Rijeka in Croatia and from Belgrade in Serbia. Exact figures showing the distribution from each centre are unavailable.

No aid was delivered by air to Bosnia-Herzegovina from Croatia or Serbia during this period—the airlift to Sarajevo operates from Ancona in Italy and has delivered a total of 38,356 tonnes to date. The air drops to eastern Bosnia operate from Rheinmain in Germany and have delivered 2,849 tonnes to date.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate his Department has made of the number of Serbian refugees displaced by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Nations does not keep records of displaced people in the former Yugoslavia by ethnic origin. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are now a total of 457,000 displaced people in Serbia, of whom 291,000 have come from Bosnia-Herzegovina and 166,000 from Croatia.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on incidents involving the stopping of United Nations and humanitarian aid convoys by Croat forces in Bosnia on *(a)* 11 May and *(b)* 12 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We understand that on Monday 10 May a UNHCR convoy manned by Bosnian Muslim drivers en route from Metkovic to Zenica was stopped at a Bosnian Croat militia (HVO) checkpoint. Reports indicate that the vehicles were damaged, some of the goods were stolen and several of the drivers were beaten. The convoy then proceeded to Gorni Vakuf, where the drivers received medical attention from British UNPROFOR troops, and finally returned to Metkovic on 11 May.

We have no reports of any incidents involving UNHCR convoys on Tuesday 11 May. But on Wednesday 12 May the HVO stopped a UNHCR convoy manned by Danish drivers which carried Italian goods and visiting Italian officials. The convoy, en route from Split to Zenica was held up for nine hours, but eventually allowed to proceed without harm to goods or personnel.

Indonesia

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the terms on which £65 million aid was granted to the Government of Indonesia to develop a power project in east Kalimantan; if he will name the project; and if he will list the British companies involved.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The £65 million loan arrangement signed with the Indonesian Government in April 1993 provided finance at 3·5 per cent. interest, repayable over 25 years with a seven-year grace period.

The Samarinda electric power project in east Kalimantan is likely to utilise most of the £65 million. The Indonesian electricity authority will award a contract for equipment supply after a competition between a number of British suppliers.

Family Planning Projects

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how ODA-funded population and family planning projects are evaluated; what criteria are used; which organisations have been evaluated; and with what results.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* ODA's evaluation department is responsible for formal impact evaluations of, mostly, bilateral aid spending. Their current work programme includes population and family planning projects. The criteria used for their evaluation are the same as for other ODA programmes, and include assessing how far the objectives of the spending have been achieved and its impact on intended beneficiaries in comparison with cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Yugoslavia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policies were put forward by Foreign Ministers of other member states in relation to the commitment of ground forces and combat aircraft in the former Yugoslavia at the most recent EC Foreign Affairs Council.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Keighley on 19 May at column *168*.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise in the European Council the issue of human rights in Croatia and the role of extreme right-wing groups in that country.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The behaviour of the Croatian Government and its human rights record are regularly discussed with our EC partners. These factors, together with the Croatian Government's attitude towards fighting between Croats and Muslims in Bosnia, and towards the Serbs in Krajina, are taken into account in determining EC policy towards Croatia.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many visa applications

from holders of Yugoslav passports have been refused since the introduction of visa requirements; and how many have been issued during the same period.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The method of collecting statistics at posts world wide does not normally allow us to establish the number of applications by nationality. For an initial period, however, we are monitoring the effect of the visa regime on former Yugoslav nationals at the visa sections in Belgrade, Zagreb, Vienna, Budapest, Sofia, Rome, Milan, Florence, Naples, Dusseldorf and Paris. At these Posts, up to the end of April, 494 applications from former Yugoslav nationals had been refused; 3,918 applications were granted.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to contribute monitors, including military personnel, along the border of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We support the deployment of international observers on Bosnia's borders with Serbia and Montenegro to monitor implementation of the prohibition of supplies (except humanitarian goods) to areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina controlled by the Bosnian Serbs. The United Nations Security Council is now actively considering detailed proposals. As yet no decisions have been taken on how the United Kingdom would contribute to international efforts to implement measures agreed by the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken to provide monitors to police the border between Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina; and when he expects the first monitors to be in place.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The United Nations Security Council is actively considering proposals to deploy international observers on Bosnia's borders with Serbia and Montenegro. We hope that these personnel will take up their duties as soon as possible.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he first became aware of a proposal by the Federal Government of Yugoslavia to put the border between Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina under the supervision of United Nation monitors; and how this was responded to by Her Majesty's Government and EC partners.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Serbia and Montenegro authorities announced on 6 May their intention to prohibit the supply of all goods (except humanitarian supplies) to the Bosnian Serbs. We hope that the United Nations Security Council will soon agree to deploy international observers to monitor implementation of these measures. At its meeting on 10 May the EC Foreign Affairs Council indicated that the European Community and its Member States would be willing to contribute to international efforts to support implementation.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has in respect of human rights abuses and restrictions on the press and media in Croatia; and what representations have been made to the Government of Croatia.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There are continuing concerns about Croatia's human rights record and treatment of the media. Several representations have been made, most recently a strong message from the EC presidency to President Tudjman on 12 May, warning that the Community would not be able to continue its support for Croatia if the violence and ethnic cleansing committed by Croats in Bosnia continue.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of detention camps operated by *(a)* Bosnian Serbs, *(b)* Bosnian Croats and *(c)* Bosnian Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regularly visits 1,023 prisoners held by Bosnian Serbs in eight places of detention, 2,200 held by Bosnian Croats in six places of detention and 1,023 held by Bosnian Muslims in 15 places of detention. The ICRC is also visiting those detained during the recent fighting between Bosnian Croat and Muslim forces in central and southern Bosnia.

BBC World Service

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his most recent estimate of the number of people living outside the United Kingdom who listen to BBC World Service broadcasts.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Latest estimates by the BBC World Service, based on audience research, indicate that the global audience for World Service broadcasts in all languages is in the region of 124 million. This figure does not include any information on audiences in certain countries, such as China, Burma and Vietnam, where reliable data are not readily available.

Wilton Park Executive Agency

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Wilton Park executive agency performed against the targets which were agreed for 1992-93; and what targets have been agreed for the current year.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Wilton Park exceeded three of the four targets set for the 1992-93 financial year and only narrowly failed, by 1 per cent., to achieve the target for cost recovery. Commercial income was lower than expected as a result of the economic recession.

The Wilton Park departmental board met on 23 April. I have agreed to the recommendation of the board that the following key targets be adopted for this financial year:

- to increase overall income from £918,000 in 1992-93 to £959,000;
- to increase cost recovery from 71·5 per cent. in 1992-93 to 72·05 per cent.;
- to increase the overall number of Wilton Park Conference participants from 957 in 1992-93 to 995;
- to reduce the average cost to the FCO of each participant from £382 to 1992-93 to £374.

HEALTH

Patients Charter

Mr. Boyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the progress being made in implementing the patients charter.

Mr. Sackville: The national health service has made considerable progress in implementing the patients charter since it came into effect on 1 April 1992. The patients charter has stimulated many innovative ideas and good practice at a local level and the efforts of the NHS should be recognised. From April 1993 the patients charter has been extended to primary health care with all family health service authorities producing their own local charters.

GP Fund Holders

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make available the letter sent to Mr. John Firth in her Department from the Audit Commission in relation to their findings on fund-holding.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave her on 31 March at col *239*.

Mammograms

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women in Pendle have been waiting more than two years for a mammogram.

Mr. Sackville: No women requiring mammography due to clinical need have waited more than two years.

Contraceptives

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to meet representatives from the United Kingdom Hormonal Contraceptive Manufacturers Group following the Government's decision to seek to extend the selected list scheme to 10 new categories.

Dr. Mawhinney: No formal invitation to meet this group has been received.

Midwives

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent midwives were employed in the NHS in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Midwifery staff, England 1987-91

	Whole-time equivalent
1987	19,130
1988	19,090
1989	19,110
1990	19,860
1991	19,640

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

NSPCC Report

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she is making to the recommendations in the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children report on joint enterprise and parents.

Mr. Yeo: I have seen a copy of the report submitted to the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which itself is expected to report in the summer. This is principally a matter for the Home Office and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Department, gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) on 5 May at column *83*.

Prescription Charges

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men aged 65 years and over, *(b)* women aged 60 years and over and *(c)* people with family health services authority exemption certificates for prescriptions there were in each year since 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney: The available information is shown in the table.

Numbers of men aged 65 years and over, women aged 60 years and over and prescription charge exemption certificates issued by family health services authorities[1] in England in each year 1988 to 1991

Year	*Men aged 65 and over*	*Women aged 60 and over*	*Exemption[2] certificates*
1988	2,981,002	5,752,924	635,779
1989	3,013,527	5,760,838	621,229
1990	3,036,790	5,758,402	594,894
1991	3,071,645	5,788,790	608,792

[1] Family health services authorities issue exemption certificates to pregnant women, women in the first year after the birth of a child and men and women with one or more of the medical conditions which confer entitlement to free prescriptions.

[2] Data derived from six-monthly statistical returns provided by family health services authorities.

Artificial Insemination

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names of the centres licensed for artificial insemination by donor from 1 August 1991, but not now licensed.

Mr. Sackville: The following donor insemination centres, operating at 1 August 1991, no longer hold licences:

Hartlepool general hospital
Mount Stuart hospital, Torquay
Royal Oldham hospital
The Heath clinic, London

The following centres were performing donor insemination on 1 August 1991, but currently hold only a storage licence:

Walm Lane clinic, London
Watford general hospital.

Non-fundholder Services

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names of provider units known by the Department of Health and NHS management executive to be restricting services to non-fundholding GPs' patients in April 1993 and May 1993.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is for national health service purchasers—health authorities and general practitioner fundholders—to place contracts with provider units to secure high quality, cost-effective services. The Government agreed with the medical profession in 1991 that providers should not offer a contract to one purchaser that would disadvantage the patients of another. We have no evidence that hospitals are not following this guidance when offering services to potential purchasers.

Absenteeism

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will publish the report prepared by Crime Prevention Consulting on absenteeism in the NHS.

Dr. Mawhinney: I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library.

Pharmacists

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received from pharmacists regarding the proposed new level of payments to pharmacists; and what will be the effect on small pharmacies.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have received a number of representations about our proposals for restructuring pharmacists' remuneration. These proposals are under discussion with the profession.

Junior Hospital Doctors and Dentists

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the hours of junior hospital doctors and dentists; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Regional task forces have reported that at 31 March there were 370 junior hospital doctors and dentists in England contracted for more than a maximum average of 83 hours a week. This is a fall of over 12,900, or 97 per cent., since September 1990. We also have reports that a further 125 posts have had their contracted hours reduced in April, bringing the total remaining posts to 245.

This represents significant progress in reducing junior doctors' and dentists' hours. I have written to health authority and trust chairmen to thank them and to emphasise that the small number of posts where contracted hours remain over 83 hours are tackled as a high priority. I will monitor progress closely.

We are determined to see further progress in reducing hours for the benefit of junior doctors and dentists.

Anophthalmia

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the small area health statistics unit, LSE, will be reporting on its examination of anophthalmia; and if she will publish their findings.

Dr. Mawhinney: A research proposal for a study into the incidence of anophthalmia in Great Britain has been received by the Department from Dr. Paul Elliott, the head of the environmental epidemiology unit at the London school of hygiene and tropical medicine. This proposal is being considered by external referees. The proposed length of the study is 18 months and the team would be expected to report shortly after that.

AIDS

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the report by Professor Nicholas Day on the spread of AIDS; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Updated projections of HIV and AIDS for England and Wales prepared by a working group chaired by Professor Day and convened by the director of the Public Health Laboratory Service will be published shortly. It would be inappropriate to comment on the report before it is published.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the financial support given by her Department to groups campaigning on the issue of AIDS for the financial years 1990-91, 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and the planned amount for 1994-95 expressed both in cash and real terms; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the funds made available by the Department under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to voluntary organisations in support of their prevention and care services for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and the years 1990-91 to 1993-94. Funding decisions for 1994-95 have not yet been made.

£ million

Year	*Cash*	*Real terms*
1990-91	1·726	1·726
1991-92	1·842	1·727
1992-93	1·987	1·800
1993-94	1·927	1·699

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will outline her Department's proposed strategy to target funding provided for HIV/AIDS prevention work more specifically than hitherto at *(a)* intravenous drug users and *(b)* homosexual men; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what policies she is proposing to ensure that narrower targeting of funding for HIV/AIDS prevention work on particularly high-risk groups has no detrimental effect on the impact of the safer sex message directed at the general population.

Mr. Sackville: The Department will ensure that funding for HIV and AIDS prevention work strikes the right balance between maintaining awareness among the wider population, and increasing the emphasis on those whose behaviour might place them at particular risk including men who have sex with men, drug users and their sexual partners.

The work will build upon the success we have had in achieving high public awareness and include education for young people in both formal and informal settings. Health authorities have been encouraged to undertake HIV prevention initiatives for those at greatest risk and provide increased facilities for HIV testing.

Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the operation of the corporate affairs intelligence unit within the NHS Management Executive with reference to its reporting mechanism and structure, its staffing structure, the number of staff employed by the unit and its budget for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 22 February at columns *482-83*.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics she has on the number of reported cases of food poisoning in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The table shows the number of reported cases for England and Wales only. Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Food poisoning cases
England and Wales 1988-92

Year	*Total*
1988	39,713
1989	52,557
1990	52,145
1991	52,543
[1]1992	64,882

[1] Provisional.
Source: OPCS.

The Government have initiated a major new surveillance programme to collect and analyse hard information about the sources and causes of human food-borne illness. As part of this programme, a major new study will start later this year in England, which aims to provide a sound basis for assessing the true incidence and causes of food-borne disease in the population as well as its economic cost.

NHS Administration

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current level of administration costs for *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities and *(c)* trusts in England.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 5 May 1993]:* The latest available (1991-92) annual accounts of regional and district health authorities in England record expenditure on headquarters administration totalling £312 million and £327 million respectively.

These figures cover the total revenue expenditure on the pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed at headquarters levels together with the costs of the purchaser function. They exclude administrative support in hospital departments and at other local levels which is regarded as operational expenditure.

The annual accounts and financial returns of national health service trusts do not separately identify administration costs of a non-operational nature.

Private Patients

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much income, by region, has been generated by private patient facilities in NHS hospitals in each year since 1987-88.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* Figures of total income from private in-patients and out-patients, derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department, are shown in the table.

Income from private patients

£ thousands (cash)

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
Northern	1,504	1,511	1,716	1,986	1,877
Yorkshire	3,425	3,769	3,963	4,888	4,542
Trent	2,385	2,794	3,114	2,809	3,465
East Anglian	3,093	3,888	4,709	5,241	7,319
North West Thames	8,150	10,233	11,700	13,171	13,984
North East Thames	8,791	10,987	13,958	16,184	11,158
South East Thames	6,828	7,809	8,576	10,905	11,692
South West Thames	2,702	2,729	3,291	4,061	3,528
Wessex	1,665	2,202	2,471	3,263	4,383
Oxford	4,849	5,778	8,083	9,462	9,725
South Western	2,627	3,154	3,591	4,750	2,112
West Midlands	3,439	3,594	4,313	5,573	6,327
Mersey	2,055	2,032	1,648	1,981	2,006
North Western	4,094	4,505	5,302	6,533	4,950
SHAs	11,287	11,910	15,141	16,663	21,513
NHS Trusts	—	—	—	—	32,254
TOTAL	66,893	76,895	91,577	107,472	140,834

Notes:
1. SHAs = Special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals.
2. Some total columns do not add precisely because of rounding.

Hillingdon Hospital Incinerator

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive's most recent inspection of Hillingdon hospital incinerator; what was the date of the inspection and the outcome of consideration of corrosion in the water tubes; and if she is satisfied that inspections are being carried out sufficiently regularly for the safety of employees and local residents.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) last inspected the incinerator at Hillingdon hospital on 4 August 1992 in connection with an associated liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) storage installation.

HSE learned on 15 April that a steam boiler tube associated with the incinerator had failed on 16 March 1993. HSE has obtained confirmation from the operator of the incinerator that all the necessary thorough examinations had been made before the incident and that no

repairs affecting safety had been required. HSE has also been informed that the water treatment system to prevent corrosion has since been modified and that a new boiler will be installed in June 1993. Failure of a boiler tube is detected by an automatic monitoring system which shuts down the boiler and presents no danger to employees or local residents.

It is the duty of the operator of the incinerator to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees and the health and safety of others, including local residents, in connection with its operation. We are satisfied with HSE's arrangements to monitor the operator's compliance with health and safety legislation and that the statutory requirements in respect of the incinerator have been complied with.

Responsibility for inspecting environmental pollution matters under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 rests with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Pharmacies (West Midlands)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total number of pharmacies in the west midlands; and how many dispense fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

Dr. Mawhinney *[pursuant to his reply, 14 May 1993, c. 590]:* I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should have read:

The total number of pharmacies in the west midlands in 1991-92, the latest year for which figures are available, was 1,073. Of these, 227 pharmacies were dispensing fewer than 2,000 prescriptions a month.

DEFENCE

Bosnia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the numbers of regular Croatian army forces currently in Bosnia-Herzegovina; what assessment has been made of the potential additional risk their presence poses to British forces under United Nations command; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no accurate figures available of the number of regular Croatian army forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina. We judge that the involvement of these forces does not significantly increase the threat to British forces at present.

TASM

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his latest proposals in respect of the tactical air-to-surface missile system.

Mr. Aitken: We continue to study a range of possible options for our long-term sub-strategic nuclear capability. An announcement on the outcome will be made at the appropriate time.

Lance Corporal Gary Fryer

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will send to the hon. Member for Stockton, South a full report, including the inquest and inquiry reports, of the circumstances in which Lance Corporal Gary Fryer was killed on 16 October 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A summary of the service police report into the circumstances surrounding Lance Corporal Fryer's death will be released to the next of kin, on request, after the coroner's inquest. This is standard practice in incidents of this sort, but it is not our normal practice to release the information to anyone other than the next of kin. A date for the inquest has not been fixed.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the circumstances in which Lance Corporal Gary Fryer, No. 24792566 of the Royal Corps of Signals was killed on 16 October 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Lance Corporal Gary Fryer was driving as part of a British military convoy, consisting of 14 vehicles. The convoy was driving along the autobahn route 28, en route to Emden, Germany. Because the convoy was strung out, the leading vehicle stopped on the hard shoulder on the westbound carriageway, between the junctions of Apen/Remel and Filsum.

Lance Corporal Fryer left his vehicle and was hit by a Dutch civilian articulated Scania lorry and trailer, which was attempting to overtake the convoy. He sustained fatal injuries. The accident occurred around 3 am

The incident was investigated by the German civil police and the Royal Military Police. A copy of the police reports have been passed to the Warrington coroner.

The driver of the articulated lorry is a Dutch national and faces prosecution on various charges in Holland as a result of the accident. The coroner will not fix a date for an inquest until legal proceedings concerning the accident are complete.

Radiation Warnings

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what efforts have been made by his Department to date to provide information to the general public on *(a)* issuing early warnings of radiation hazards, *(b)* the early identification and cordoning-off of contaminated areas, *(c)* medical screening and decontamination of those contaminated with plutonium and *(d)* the restoration to safe use of contaminated land and buildings in the event of a nuclear weapon transportation accident in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Aitken: The Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations 1992 require that prior information be supplied to members of the public who are likely to be in an area in which they are liable to be affected by a reasonably foreseeable radiation emergency. In the case of nuclear weapon transport, the likelihood of an accident affecting any individual member of the public is so extremely remote that prior supply of information is not required.

Sunburst Missiles

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the dangers posed to British forces in the Persian Gulf by Sunburst cruise missiles; and what discussions he has had with his Ukranian counterpart about the sale of the missiles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no evidence that Ukraine has sold cruise missiles to Iran and the Ukrainians have publicly denied that they have made any such sale. My Department has not therefore discussed the matter with Ukraine.

Metrology

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the future metrology needs of each business section of the Defence Research Agency; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the full financial appraisal made by his Department or the Defence Research Agency before finalising the sale of the mechanical metrology laboratory in Woolwich;

(3) what place the proposals to sell off the mechanical metrology laboratory have in his programme of asset selling or privatisation of activities within the Defence Research Agency; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what account has been taken of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 in respect of the proposed sale of the mechanical metrology laboratory at Woolwich;

(5) what consultations took place, and with whom, prior to his granting approval to the Defence Research Agency to offer the mechanical metrology laboratory for sale;

(6) if he will list the dates *(a)* of publication and circulation of the Defence Research Agency consultative document on the proposed sale of the directorate of quality assurance and technical support's mechanical metrology laboratory, *(b)* when the option 4 was chosen as the preferred option and *(c)* of the initial approach to and subsequent appointment of Capita Corporate Finance Ltd;

(7) what assessment he has made of the risk to the Ministry of Defence as purchaser, both in terms of quality and price, of having to deal with a private sector monopoly provider if the sale of the directorate of quality assurance and technical support's mechanical metrology laboratory proceeds;

(8) what extent the cost/benefit analysis of option 4 contained in the Defence Research Agency's consultative document on the proposed sale of the directorate of quality assurance and technical support's mechanical metrology laboratory includes possible redundancy costs;

(9) if he will set out his proposed timetable for the sell-off of the directorate of quality assurance and technical support's mechanical metrology laboratory at Woolwich; and if he would be willing to extend this to facilitate an in-house bid being made;

(10) if he will make it his policy that the DQATS mechanical metrology laboratory will remain in Woolwich.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter delegated to the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letters from Mr. J. Chisholm to Mr. John Austin-Walker, dated 20 May 1993:

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the future metrology needs of the DRA.

We carried out extensive consultations with military customers, looked very carefully at out own DRA needs, and retained consultants to advise, amongst other things, on the commercial propects. As a result of this, we concluded that there was an ongoing requirement for mechanical metrology but that the MOD/DRA demand was insufficient to take up the full capability of the Laboratory. What we are seeking to do, therefore, is to find a private sector buyer who would be able to combine the potential MOD/DRA customer base with his existing commercial market and offer a cost-effective service to both us and to industry at large.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your request that the investment appraisal carried out for the posssible sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory should be placed in the Library.

The financial case for each of the possible options for the future of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory is summarised in the Consultative Document issued to staff and Trade Unions. I have today arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library. The release of any more detailed financial information could jeopardise the commercial confidentiality of the terms of sale.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the possible sale of the DRA's Mechanical Laboratory.

It has recently become apparent that the likely future income of this Mechanical Metrology Laboratory is insufficient to cover its costs. Rather than simply closing down the Laboratory I have, therefore, begun to explore the possibility of finding a private sector buyer. This is a logical response to a very specific problem. It is not part of any wider policy of privatisation.

With regard to asset selling, the DRA will, of course, be vacating a large number of sites over the next few years as part of its rationalisation programme and those sites will be handed back to the Ministry of Defence for alternative use or disposal. The site of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory at Woolwich will eventually be treated in exactly the same way.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question concerning the application of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations to the proposed sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory at Woolwich.

The legal view is that the 'TUPE' regulations will apply to the sale of the Laboratory and I would expect potential buyers to take account of that in putting together their bids. There are a number of non-mobile staff in the Laboratory to whom a commitment has been given that they will have the opportunity to opt to return to the MOD. This commitment will be honoured.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the proposed sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory.

Following consultation within the Ministry of Defence, Ministerial approval was given in April 1993 to initiate consultations with the staff and trades unions and at the same time to test the market for potential buyers for the Laboratory. No final decision will be taken regarding the sale until we have considered the outcome of the staff and TU consultation, which has now been completed, and evaluated the offers received.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the proposed sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory.

The Consultative Document was published and circulated to staff on 1 April 1993. It put forward Option 4 as the preferred solution but whether this is subsequently confirmed will depend on the outcome of the consultation exercise that has just been completed with the staff and trades unions and the evaluation of offers received from potential purchasers.

Capita Corporate Finance Limited were retained by the Defence Research Agency in February 1993 to carry out a financial appraisal of the Option for the Laboratory, including possible sale. They are now assisting us in the advertising of the Laboratory and will advise us on the acceptability of bids received. It will, however, be for me as

Chief Executive of the Defence Research Agency to decide what final recommendations to make to the Minister of State for Defence Procurement.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the impact of the possible sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory on the service provided to Ministry of Defence customers.

The market for mechanical metrology is characterised by a diversity of both public sector and private sector suppliers. Most of the services offered by our Laboratory could be provided by alternative sources, which is why we have looked at closure as a possible option. Our Laboratory does, however, have some particular skills and capabilities which, whilst not enough to justify its retention by the DRA, are of sufficient advantage to our customers to prompt us to look for ways of sustaining its continued existence in the private sector. Survival in the private sector would, however, depend upon the Laboratory being able to attract new commercial customers and retain existing MOD ones whether owned by the DRA or by a private sector concern, it would not be a monopoly supplier.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the increase of redundancy costs in the cost/benefit analysis of the way ahead.

We have taken into account all the costs associated with each of the options available to us. That includes the redundancy costs that might arise in the event of a sale proceeding and not all staff transferring to the new owner.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the timetable for the possible sale of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory, and the feasibility of accommodating an in-house bid.

Expressions of interest were invited from private sector firms on 27 April by Capita Corporate Finance Limited who are handling the mechanics of the process for us. Final bids will be invited from the three or four most promising firms sometime in early July. We expect to be in a position to make our selection and put a recommendation to Ministers in early August.

I do not believe there is any future for Mechanical Metrology within the DRA, which is why I have been exploring the option of a sale. An in-house bid is not therefore appropriate. The reason we are pursuing the possibility of a sale for the Laboratory is that whilst the quality of the work provided is excellent, the volume and demand cannot meet costs. The Laboratory does not have the skills and network of contracts to exploit possible commercial markets which is what a potential buyer would bring. An in-house bid would, therefore, not be feasible unless augmented by considerable additional resource. I would not, however, discourage a proposal for a 'management buy-out' although this would, of course, have to be evaluated alongside other offers from the private sector.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying directly to your question regarding the future location of the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory.

The DRA is already committed to withdrawing from Woolwich by 1995-96 as part of its rationalisation programme and I understand the MOD is intending to close the site shortly afterwards. It is not, therefore, feasible for the Mechanical Metrology Laboratory to remain on the site in the longer term although we have made it clear to potential purchasers that they could negotiate an agreement with the MOD to keep the Laboratory on the site for a transitional period.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is proposed to establish the directorate general test and evaluation as an agency; and if he has considered incorporating the present directorate of quality assurance and technical support's mechanical metrology laboratory within the proposed agency.

Mr. Aitken: Although the Directorate General of Test and Evaluation has been identified as a candidate for agency status I have not yet taken a final decision. The Mechanical Metrology Laboratory has not been considered for inclusion within DGT&E but there is no reason for the task to be retained within the public sector and the aim of the Defence Research Agency—the current owner—is to offer the facility for sale as a going concern.

Falklands War

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which *(a)* current and *(b)* former officers he has received reports or other documents relating to allegations concerning possible war crimes during the Falklands conflict; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have seen one letter from a former officer who served in the Falklands during the conflict in 1982. I have also received reports from within the Department on the allegations of possible war crimes.

The allegations are currently being investigated by the Metropolitan police who have the full co-operation of my Department. During the course of their investigations, the Metropolitan police continue to have access to all relevant departmental and regimental files.

Naval Support Command

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he expects to announce his decision on the site chosen for the establishment of the naval support command; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I hope to be able to announce soon our preferred location for the headquarters of the naval support command, and the start of formal consultations with all interested parties.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates, venues and methods of disposal for stocks of genetically modified organisms which have been held by his Department in each year when such disposals have occurred.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment (CBDE) and I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Mr. G. Pearson to Mrs. Ann Winterton, dated 20 May 1993:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him if he will list the dates, venues and methods of disposal for stocks of genetically modified organisms which have been held by his Department in each year when such disposals have occurred (Question 9, Order Paper 12 May 1993) has been passed to me to reply as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out research to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures

against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. The research includes assessing the threat to the UK Armed Forces from genetically modified organisms.

3. The reasons for producing, storing and disposing of genetically modified organisms were stated in my letter to you of 17 May 1993 in reply to your Parliamentary Question asking whether any stocks of genetically modified organisms are currently held by the Ministry of Defence. As I indicated in that letter genetically modified organisms that do not exhibit properties of value to the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment research programme are destroyed. As such, genetically modified organisms are disposed of at CBDE as they are evaluated and this can be as frequent as daily. Before disposal they are inactivated by high temperature steam in an autoclave in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Health and Safety Executive Advisory Committee on Genetic Manipulation. The inactivated organisms are then disposed of using normal cleansing procedures. The work at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment on genetically modified organisms has been in progress for the past 9 years and disposals have been made as described above since the start of the work.

SCOTLAND

Quarrying

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he will take on the appeal from Scottish Aggregates Ltd. against the refusal of planning permission to develop a quarry at Windyhill Farm, Elderslie by Renfrew district council; what procedures he will apply to ensure that local residents have the opportunity to put their case; what steps he takes to ensure that local elected representatives are kept abreast of the situation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has not received any appeal in respect of the development to which the hon. Member refers.

Council Housing

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is his latest estimate of the receipts from council house sales in Edinburgh that will count towards this year's capital allocation;

(2) how much money he will allow Edinburgh district council to borrow for capital expenditure on council housing this year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Edinburgh district council's gross final HRA capital allocation for investment in council housing in 1993-94 is £30·702 million. This consists of a net allocation of £14·855 million, plus estimated HRA capital receipts of £15·847 million (of which £14·926 million are in respect of council house sales).

Water Bills

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated added cost to the average water bill in *(a)* Lothian and *(b)* Strathclyde as a result of non-payment of water bills.

Sir Hector Monro: In setting council water charges for 1993-94, Lothian and Strathclyde regional councils have assumed collection rates of 95 per cent. and 90 per cent. respectively. On average, this gives added costs of £3 in Lothian and £6 in Strathclyde regional council.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households in *(a)* Lothian and *(b)* Strathclyde are in arrears with water bills; and what is the estimated amount.

Sir Hector Monro: Details of the numbers of households in Lothian and Strathclyde in arrears with community water charges are not held centrally.

Raymond Gilmour

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current position relating to the appeal of Raymond Gilmour, currently detained in Saughton prison on the conviction of murder.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Representations were submitted on behalf of Mr. Raymond Gilmour on 8 January and 12 March this year concerning his conviction for murder at Glasgow High Court on 7 June 1982. Detailed inquiries are being made into the matters raised by these petitions. The hon. Member will be informed as soon as a decision has been reached in his constituent's case.

Children's Hospices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 February to the hon. Member for Ayr, *Official Report*, columns *785-86*, what plans he has for the development of childrens' hospices to serve areas of Scotland remote from the hospice proposed by the Children's Hospice Association, Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: None. The hospice being established by the Children's Hospice Association Scotland will accept children from all parts of Scotland.

Railway Stations (Lifts)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration British Rail's advisory group on disability has given to installing passenger lifts to allow people with mobility disabilities access to railway stations in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The role of the British Rail advisory group on disability (BRAG) is to advise BR on provision for disabled passengers. The group does not report to Ministers. The consideration by BRAG of any specific issues is therefore an internal matter for the group and for BR.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Lang: The Office of the Data Protection Registrar has verified that one complaint of unauthorised disclosure was received against the Scottish Office on 9 May 1991. After investigation, the Registrar confirmed that under the Data Protection Act 1984 no breach of the principle of disclosure had taken place.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, column *408*, what steps he has taken to ensure that general practitioner fund holders, in providing care themselves, or in setting contracts with other providers, will not directly disadvantage NHS patients from other practices.

Mr. Stewart: Existing guidance concerning GP fund holders' setting contracts with other providers is contained in the procedural manual on GP fund-holding issued by the management executive of the national health service in Scotland. This already requires that providers ensure that contracts with one purchaser will not disadvantage the patients of another.

Copies of this manual have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

In consultation with health boards, guidance is currently in the process of being compiled which will incorporate the principle that GP fund holders in providing care themselves, will not directly disadvantage NHS patients from other practices. This guidance when completed will be included in the manual.

Enterprise Trust, Glasgow

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the budget and actual expenditure for each year since 1987 of the East End management unit and the East End Executive in Glasgow.

Mr. Stewart: The East End Executive is an enterprise trust, established in 1990, and has received support from a variety of public and private sector sources, including Glasgow Development Agency. The East End management unit is, I understand, jointly funded by Strathclyde regional council and Glasgow district council and has also received some project funding from the Glasgow Development Agency.

Since neither of these organisations is responsible to, nor directly funded by, the Scottish Office we do not hold the information that the hon. Member requests. I suggest that he might best take up his inquiries direct with them.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what account the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department took of countryside values in considering whether to object to the proposed opencast mining at Woodbank Farm, Armadale; if he will list each other factor considered by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department; and if he will place in the Library the text of his Department's advice to the West Lothian district council on this proposal.

Sir Hector Monro: The Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department was consulted by West Lothian district council about the proposed opencast mining at Woodbank farm, Armadale, in accordance with the established procedures for consultations on developments affecting agricultural land. Wider questions concerning the effect of the proposals on the countryside would be for others to consider. After considering the agricultural quality of the land in question and the scale and nature of the proposals, the Department advised that it had no objections provided restoration and after-care are undertaken to a suitable standard. A list of detailed restoration conditions was supplied to the district council. I am arranging for a copy of the Department's response and the conditions to be placed in the Library.

Reparation and Mediation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the development of reparation and mediation between victims and offenders in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In this financial year the grant offered to Scottish Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (SACRO) for reparation and mediation was increased by just over 25 per cent. from £16,720 to £21,000. Following discussions with SACRO this grant will enable the director of the Edinburgh scheme to continue to develop the concept of reparation and mediation and to produce a document of guidance for the development of other such schemes.

Two new schemes, one in Hamilton and the other in Aberdeen, have recently received urban programme support. Reparation and mediation has a significant contribution to make within diversion from prosecution policies and research has been commissioned into the operation of the Edinburgh scheme. I will examine carefully the findings of this research and determine how best we can take forward the development of this useful alternative to prosecution.

Student Allowances

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of any changes in students' allowances for 1993-94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am publishing today the main rates of allowances payable under the postgraduate students' allowances scheme for vocational postgraduate courses which do not attract student loans, together with the rates of various supplementary allowances payable to both undergraduate and vocational postgraduate award holders. The main rates of maintenance allowance for undergraduates will remain frozen at their 1990-91 cash levels following the introduction of student loans.

Details of the new rates have been placed in the Library. The increases in these rates are in line with the 2·7 per cent. increase in the overall provision for student maintenance envisaged in the autumn statement.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Kynoch: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the income scale which will apply to the assisted places scheme in Scotland in 1993-94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: For school session 1993-94, I propose to lay regulations before the House in due course providing for progressive parental contribution for one assisted pupil in relation to family income as follows:

Parental contribution	
Part of relevant income to which the specified percentage applies	*percentage*
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,356 but does not exceed £10,173	9
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,173 but does not exceed £11,005	12
That part (if any) which exceeds £11,005 but does not exceed £12,654	15
That part (if any) which exceeds £12,654 but does not exceed £15,189	21
That part (if any) which exceeds £15,189 but does not exceed £18,500	24
That part (if any) which exceeds £18,500	33

The relevant income scale is open ended, but the remission can, of course, be given only where the parental contribution is less than the school tuition fee.

Health Service Suspensions

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS hospital doctors and consultants are currently under suspension pending inquiries and disciplinary action.

Mr. Stewart: This information is not held centrally.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to monitor the proportion of construction and construction-related jobs associated with the Skye bridge contract which are being secured by local labour; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* The contractor issues a monthly progress report which includes a breakdown of sub-contractors and work force engaged on the contract. The proportion of local sub-contractors and labour can be determined from the details given.

HIV and Drugs Services

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was given to each health board in Scotland for HIV/AIDS and drugs services in *(a)* 1992-93 and *(b)* 1993-94.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The proposed allocation of monies to each health board in Scotland for HIV/AIDS and drugs services is shown in the table:

	HIV/AIDS		*Drugs*	
	1992-93	*1993-94*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Argyll and Clyde	592,328	620,729	96,381	100,000
Ayrshire and Arran	460,032	543,936	189,572	195,000
Borders	147,846	153,000	23,862	25,000
Dumfries and Galloway	207,767	235,222	34,377	37,000
Fife	465,235	481,773	70,395	75,000
Forth Valley	473,000	449,000	56,094	63,000
Grampian	1,233,067	1,235,000	102,863	107,000
Greater Glasgow	4,188,787	4,559,968	772,956	788,000
Highland	288,595	324,940	46,949	36,000
Lanarkshire	657,667	708,000	109,480	115,000
Lothian	7,592,400	7,300,000	629,456	640,000
Orkney	26,739	28,454	4,876	5,500
Shetland	30,892	33,392	5,404	6,500
Tayside	2,589,583	2,643,000	260,795	265,000
Western Isles	47,062	47,062	8,650	9,000
State Hospital	—	34,000	—	—
Total	[1]19,001,000	19,397,476	2,412,110	2,467,000

[1] Includes £500,000 to enable health boards to implement recommendations of the ministerial AIDS task force.

Access to Information

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the range of charges made by local authorities in Scotland for copies of registers requested by the public under the public access to information provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* This information is not held centrally. It is a matter for local authorities to set reasonable charges for providing copies of information under the terms of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Community Care

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a system of dowry funding to the community care arrangements in Scotland equivalent to that operated in other parts of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has no such plans. In Scotland we have adopted alternative arrangements to facilitate the transfer of resources from health boards to local authorities to reflect the shift in the balance or responsibilities that is associated with the transfer of patients from long-stay hospitals into the community. Those arrangements were arrived at after consulation with all relevant interests.

Infant Mortality

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the infant mortality rate in each Scottish parliamentary constituency over the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* As my hon. Friend the then Minister for Health and Education told the hon. Gentleman in response to his previous question on 7 June 1991 at column *320*, it is not our practice to quote infant mortality rates for small areas such as individual parliamentary constituencies, because such comparisons are likely to be misleading. Infant mortality in Scotland is at an all-time low (only 6·8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1992) and most Scottish constituencies have fewer than 10 infant deaths a year. If these small numbers of deaths are divided by the very much larger numbers of live births to give a rate per thousand, the effect of even one untimely death is such as to make the rate swing sharply up or down, making its use for comparision between areas, or between years, of little value.

I am therefore appending a table showing the infant mortality rates for Scotland and the *number* of infant deaths in each constituency for each of the last five years.

Infant mortality rate for Scotland and numbers of infant deaths by Parliamentary constituency, Scotland, 1987-1992 (provisional figures for 1992)

	Deaths per 1,000 live births					
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Scotland	8·5	8·2	8·7	7·7	7·1	6·8
Angus East	4	11	9	8	5	4
Argyll and Bute	10	7	10	8	9	8
Ayr	4	6	11	8	7	4
Banff and Buchan	5	5	10	6	5	10
Caithness and Sutherland	6	4	6	1	1	3
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	9	10	9	5	10	11
Central Fife	16	6	7	8	6	3
Clackmannan	7	9	9	7	7	8
Clydebank and Milngavie	5	7	6	6	3	7
Clydesdale	8	11	6	8	5	9
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	1	3	8	4	5	3
Cunninghame North	7	7	9	5	3	10
Cunninghame South	13	13	8	4	14	7
Dumbarton	5	17	7	12	8	8
Dumfries	10	10	16	6	10	4
Dunfermline East	12	11	9	6	10	4
Dunfermline West	13	11	6	10	2	12
East Kilbride	4	8	10	3	6	5
East Lothian	6	8	3	4	3	7
Falkirk East	10	7	12	7	5	5
Falkirk West	6	4	11	8	7	2
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	7	5	7	4	9	9
Gordon	6	9	5	9	9	7
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	9	12	5	12	7	8
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	14	11	15	9	8	7
Kincardine and Deeside	9	9	3	6	6	8
Kirkcaldy	7	4	6	5	6	7
Linlithgow	6	7	11	5	8	6
Livingston	17	12	12	11	10	8
Midlothian	7	7	9	10	5	5
Moray	8	8	8	12	1	5
North East Fife	4	3	9	3	3	3
North Tayside	8	3	8	7	8	4
Orkney and Shetland	4	2	4	2	7	3
Perth and Kinross	11	6	8	11	7	8
Renfrew West and Inverclyde	6	8	7	5	4	3
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	12	7	5	9	7	7
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	5	0	2	9	1	3
Stirling	5	11	6	6	7	6
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	11	9	6	7	4	6
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	5	6	3	4	6	4
Western Isles	2	2	1	3	2	2
Aberdeen North	16	12	6	5	5	7
Aberdeen South	5	11	10	8	5	4
Dundee East	7	12	8	10	6	5
Dundee West	5	7	4	7	5	5
Edinburgh Central	4	4	6	3	6	10
Edinburgh East	10	7	3	11	8	10
Edinburgh, Leith	11	8	8	15	9	9
Edinburgh, Pentlands	12	8	11	8	6	7
Edinburgh South	7	6	8	8	11	6
Edinburgh West	8	4	8	2	7	3
Glasgow, Cathcart	8	4	7	3	8	5
Glasgow Central	11	6	4	5	9	11
Glasgow, Garscadden	9	9	3	8	10	6
Glasgow, Govan	2	9	10	5	4	8
Glasgow, Hillhead	5	6	7	0	4	10
Glasgow, Maryhill	10	11	12	10	3	9
Glasgow, Pollok	7	6	14	9	13	8
Glasgow, Provan	7	18	9	6	10	10

	Deaths per 1,000 live births					
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Glasgow, Ruthergien	13	2	10	8	4	3
Glasgow, Shettleston	7	7	6	5	3	4
Glasgow, Springburn	7	8	11	9	9	6
Greenock and Port Glasgow	4	5	5	12	5	7
Hamilton	2	6	11	11	9	1
Monklands, East	12	7	8	4	6	10
Monklands, West	2	9	5	8	14	7
Motherwell, North	16	6	8	11	15	6
Motherwell, South	7	7	6	9	7	1
Paisley, North	7	9	6	10	6	6
Paisley, South	10	8	6	9	4	7
SCOTLAND	563	543	554	510	473	449

Argyll and Clyde Health Board

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many nominations he received for the positions on Argyll and Clyde health board which fell vacant on 31 March; which individuals, parties or organisations submitted these nominations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Total nominations received	194
Self-nominations	162
Parties or organisations	32

There is a statutory requirement on the Secretary of State to seek nominations for membership of health boards from specified bodies including local authorities and organisations representing the health professions. On this occasion it was decided in addition to place public advertisements relating to NHS trusts as well as health boards. Organisations which responded in respect of Argyll and Clyde were: univeristy of Strathclyde, Paisley chamber of commerce, British Medical Association, Scottish Trades Union Congress, Inverclyde Community Care Forum, British Red Cross Society (Dunbartonshire area), Bank of Scotland, Scottish Association of Care Home Owners, Argyll and Bute district council, Renfrewshire Enterprise Limited, Arthritis Care, Strathclyde regional council, Renfrew district council, Scottish National Housing and Town Planning Council and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. The hon. Member himself made two nominations.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints have been received by *(a)* the Scottish Office and *(b)* the Scottish ambulance service about the operation of that service in the Argyll and Clyde health board area in each month since January 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The number of complaints received are as follows:

Month	Scottish Office	Scottish Ambulance Service
1992		
January	—	4
February	—	—
March	—	4
April	—	2
May	—	4
June	—	5
July	—	1
August	—	3
September	2	5
October	1	6
November	—	6
December	—	2
1993		
January	3	7
February	1	8
March	—	6
April	3	7

In proportion to the average number of patients carried each month of 12,500, the number of complaints is relatively small at approximately 0·03 per cent. of patients dealt with. This is broadly similar to other areas in the west of Scotland. However, the Scottish ambulance service takes all complaints seriously and will investigate these promptly. The senior managers take appropriate action to remedy any practices or procedures which have been deficient and to discipline any member of staff who has failed to comply with the appropriate instructions. A senior ambulance officer will usually visit the complainant to explain and apologise where the service was not at the required standard. The Scottish ambulance service patient charter sets out the standards aimed at and the procedure for making complaints. Copies of the charter have been widely distributed and its contents are made known on a regular basis to patients and relatives being conveyed by the service.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals the Argyll and Clyde health board has for the disposal or utilisation of the former clinic at Quarry street/Church street, Johnstone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The former clinic premises have been advertised for sale by selling agents appointed by Argyll and Clyde health board.

Scottish Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the organisational structure of Scottish Homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* It is the responsibility of Scottish Homes to devise an organisational structure capable of delivering the objectives contained in its strategic plan, which has to be approved annually by my right hon. Friend. The creation of any new post in the organisation at a level equivalent to grade 5 or above in the civil service requires the prior approval of my Department.

Royal Alexandra Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent on refurbishing or improving the administration areas of the Royal Alexandra hospital in each of the past five years; how much is planned to be spent in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the future financial years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* Expenditure on refurbishing and improving all administration areas including those for clinicians and their administrative support staff within the Royal Alexandra hospital over the past five years was as follows:

	£
1988-89	10,000
1989-90	16,000
1990-91	365,500
1991-92	28,100
1992-93	115,500

Planned expenditure on administration areas in 1993-94 is £2,000. There are no further expenditure plans for such areas at present.

Further Education College Principals

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many principals of further education colleges in Scotland received bonus payments following the colleges' incorporation in April; how such payments were authorised; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Information on bonus payments to principals is not held centrally.

From 1 April 1993 the employers of further education college staff, including principals, are boards of management. Remuneration is for them to determine.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who authorised payment of bonuses to further education college principals in the year to 1 April.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* Prior to 1 April 1993, principals of further education colleges were employees of education authorities. Any bonuses paid would be for them or college councils to authorise, having regard to their statutory powers.

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which further education college principals received bonus payments in the year to 1 April;

(2) from which budgets bonuses to further education college principals came in the year prior to 1 April.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* This information is not held centrally.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what amount the weighted average price of *(a)* services, other than foreign holidays, and *(b)* goods other than food, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, fuel, petrol and oil covered by the retail prices index has risen since January 1987.

Mr. Nelson: The information is not available in the form requested and can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy with respect to the exclusion from the calculation of the retail price index of such increases as are the result of Government intervention on interest rates.

Mr. Nelson: The retail prices index includes the cost of mortgage interest payments as part of the housing costs of those who are buying their own home. Because of the sensitivity of this component of the RPI to changes in interest rates, it is better when assessing underlying inflationary pressures to look at changes in the index for all items other than mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase since January 1987 in the costs of *(a)* mortgage interest, *(b)* electricity, *(c)* entertainments and recreation and *(d)* books and newspapers relative to the change in the retail prices index.

Mr. Nelson: The following table gives the information:

Retail Prices Index January 1987 to March 1993

	percentage increase
Mortgage interest payments	40·6
Electricity	42·7
Entertainment and recreation	75·1
Books and newspapers	57·0
ALL ITEMS	39·3

Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the materials purchased by each of the selected broad sectors of industry listed in table 18.3 of the Annual Abstract of Statistics 1992 was imported; what was the corresponding figure in 1983; and if he will provide an estimate, in each case, for the years 1968, 1973 and 1979 together with figures for changes in weighted output and for import penetration from the (i) EEC, (ii) non-EEC and (iii) total, ignoring the changing industrial and import classification, but giving overlapping figures as appropriate.

Mr. Nelson: Estimates of the import content of materials purchased by manufacturers are available for

1968, 1972, 1974, 1984 and 1985[1]. These estimates, the most detailed available, are available in the Library. Estimates for 1990 will be published towards the end of this year.

[1] "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1968", table 3; "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1972"; "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1974"; "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1979"; "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1984"; "Input-Output Tables for the United Kingdom, 1985".

The following table shows consistent estimates of net output for the years 1968, 1973, 1979, 1983 and 1990. More detailed estimates are unavailable prior to 1978.

Estimates of import penetration for 1968 to 1989 are available in the Library[2]. Separate estimates for import penetration from EC and non-EC countries are not available.

[2] "The home and export performance of United Kingdom industries", Economic Trends, August 1977—for a 1968 estimate; "Manufacturing industry in the seventies: an assessment of import penetration and export performance", Economic Trends, June 1980—for annual estimates 1970 to 1979; "MQ12 Import penetration and export sales ratios for manufacturing industry"—for quarterly estimates 1975 Q4 to 1989 Q1.

1985 Weights	*Group*	*Published*	*Levels of Output (Index of Production 1985 = 100)* *1968*	*1973*	*1979*	*1983*	*1990*
26	21-22	Metals	140·7	138·9	118·5	94·2	121·3
35	23-24	Other Minerals	103·2	129·3	114·5	96·8	113·4
69	25	Chemicals	60·9	81·6	93·5	90·6	118·3
2	26	Man-made fibres	154·1	226·2	176·4	100·6	117·2
37	31	Metal goods nes	135·5	143·1	122·9	96·5	110·8
85	32	Mechanical engineering	117·2	125·6	118·0	94·3	112·3
98	33-4-7	Electrical and instrument engineering	56·5	74·9	79·5	84·4	125·4
38	35	Motor Vehicles and parts	141·8	156·6	131·5	95·2	121·6
37	36	Other transport equipment	111·1	110·4	100·6	104·0	129·7
91	41-42	Food, drink and tobacco	82·0	94·6	99·3	99·5	106·4
22	43	Textiles	142·4	152·2	123·4	93·4	92·4
25	44-45	Clothing and footwear	95·2	105·1	108·9	91·9	98·6
71	47	Paper and printing	98·7	111·3	109·5	93·4	133·9
55	46-8-9	All other manufacturing	95·0	118·1	113·8	93·8	132·3
691	2-4	All manufacturing	96·2	110·5	106·0	93·8	118·4

Training Costs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research has been conducted by his Department into the feasibility of schemes allowing employees to set their training costs against income tax.

Mr. Dorrell: We considered various schemes for tax relief for employees' training before introducing in 1991 a new income tax relief for vocational training. This vocational training relief is available to taxpayers and non-taxpayers and so benefits not just employees who pay income tax but also those outside the labour training to get back to work.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if domestic fuel bills can be zero-rated in later years after being subject to a positive rate of VAT; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Cope: Under the current EC sixth VAT directive agreed by the United Kingdom in 1976 an existing zero rate of VAT can be continued. Without a change in this directive a zero rate cannot be created, or reintroduced if ended as is proposed from next April for domestic fuel and power supplies. The directive can be changed only by the unanimous agreement of all member states.

Exchange Rate

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the effect of the fall in interest rates and the real exchange rate between *(a)* October 1981 and November 1982 and *(b)* June 1985 and April 1987 on economic recovery in (i) 1982-85 and (ii) 1987-89.

Mr. Nelson: There are a large number of influences on economic activity at any one time, and it is impossible properly to assess the effects of interest rate and real exchange rate changes in isolation.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what investigations his Departments have been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Departments to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Nelson: Her Majesty's Treasury has not been subject to any investigations by the Data Protection Registrar.

Peru (Debt)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much Government to Government debt is owed by the Government of Peru to Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Nelson: Outstanding debt owed to the United Kingdom Government by Peru in respect of credits guaranteed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) and loans advanced by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) amounts to £112 million, a large proportion of which was recently rescheduled by the Paris Club of creditor nations.

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average increase in output per head in manufacturing and non-manufacturing *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* from 1963 to 1973.

Mr. Nelson: Between 1979 and 1992, manufacturing output per head increased by 63·4 per cent. which is equivalent to an increase of 3·8 per cent. compounded over the 13 years.

In the 10 years from 1963 to 1973, manufacturing output per head increased by 50·7 per cent. This is equivalent to an increase of 4·2 per cent. compounded over the 10 years.

Output per head in non-manufacturing industries is not measured separately.

Small Firms Corporation Tax

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms currently pay small firms corporation tax.

Mr. Dorrell: About 300,000 companies are charged to corporation tax at the small companies rate and a further 30,000 receive marginal small company relief.

Tobacco Taxes

Mr Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue was raised by tobacco taxes in 1979 and 1992, with figures adjusted for inflation.

Sir John Cope: Receipts from excise duties on tobacco products were as follows:

	£ million	
	Nominal	*1992 prices*
1978	2,153	5,970
1992	6,417	6,417

National Sustainable Strategy

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the role of his Department in the drawing up of the first United Kingdom national sustainable strategy; how many civil servants in his Department will be involved in the drawing up of the plan; and what measures are being undertaken to raise awareness regarding sustainability among the departmental staff involved.

Sir John Cope: My Department will be playing a full part in the preparation of the United Kingdom's report to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development which is being co-ordinated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The number of civil servants involved will depend upon the report's contents.

Foreign Entertainers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax has been yielded in each separate tax year under the foreign entertainers legislation in the Finance Act 1986; how much of this revenue is due to tax liabilities in each year; and how much of this revenue is due to tax liabilities from past years and interest charged upon such liabilities.

Mr. Dorrell: The following is the information:

	Yield (£) relating to:		
	Actual year	*Previous year*	*Total*
[1]1987-88	6,921,507	3,178,043	10,099,550
1988-89	12,436,964	3,707,230	16,144,194
1989-90	13,259,785	4,403,960	17,663,745
1990-91	18,003,805	2,033,597	20,037,397
1991-92	16,146,336	1,410,536	17,556,872
1992-93	19,953,506	508,569	20,462,075

[1] From 1 May 1987.

The above amounts of tax and interest (which take repayments into account) were obtained from foreign entertainers and sportsmen by the Inland Revenue foreign entertainers unit.

Family Incomes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average income for a family of four in Nottinghamshire, or the nearest corresponding region, included in or including Nottinghamshire for which figures are available; and what proportion of that income is spent on tax, including value added tax and national insurance in each year since 1988.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The table shows the available information—average household income, and income tax and employees' national insurance contributions as percentages of household income per household, for Nottinghamshire, for the calendar years 1988 to 1990.

Household income for Nottinghamshire

	1988	*1989*	[1]*1990*
Household income per household (£ per year)	15,890	17,337	18,856
Income tax as percentage of household income	14·0	12·3	12·6
Employees' national insurance contributions as percentage of household income	4·0	3·4	2·4

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. Total household income based on the National Accounts definition of household income.
2. County estimates consistent with the date to be published in the Regional Accounts article in the May 1993 issue of "Economic Trends", and the national estimates published in the 1992 Blue Book.
3. County breakdown of income tax based on sample survey of Inland Revenue records, and employees' national insurance contributions based on sample of records held by Department of Social Security. Estimates at this level of detail are prone to large sampling errors.

Source: Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proportion of income paid in tax, including national insurance and VAT, paid by a family with two children and earnings of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000, *(c)* £20,000 and *(d)* £45,000 in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The figures are given in the table.

Total tax payments as a proportion of income for married couple with two children, 1988-89 to 1992-93

	Per cent. of earnings			
	£10,000	£15,000	£20,000	£45,000
1988-89	37·0	39·7	39·4	44·4
1989-90	35·0	38·3	38·8	43·5
1990-91	33·2	37·0	38·2	42·9
1991-92	33·4	37·3	39·2	42·7
1992-93	31·7	36·1	38·2	42·2

Notes:

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the assumption that the households only have income from employment, receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and have one earner, who is assumed to pay class 1 NI contributions at the contracted-in rate.
2. The estimates of indirect taxes exclude rates/Community Charge and are based on equations derived from the 1985 Family Expenditure Survey, uprated to later years using forecasts of aggregate tax receipts. They are based on the illustrative assumption that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved.

Foreign Holidays

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage the price of foreign holidays, as shown in the retail prices index, has increased since January 1987; what contribution the Government made to that increase; and what has been the effect on the balance of payments and on output and employment in the British tourist industry and on 1992 bookings in United Kingdom tourist destinations compared with the number of overseas holidays.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* A price index for foreign holidays has only been compiled for use in the retail prices index since February this year, following the recommendation of the RPI advisory committee. It is not possible properly to isolate the effects of the price of foreign holidays on the balance of payments, output and employment in the British tourist industry; or on 1992 bookings in United Kingdom tourist destinations compared with the number of overseas holidays.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Small Businesses

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the president of the Board of Trade what guidelines his Department issues to companies dealing with small businesses which do not hold BS5750.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department does not issue guidelines to industry on the use of BS5750. The decision whether or not to specify the standard is a commercial one for purchasers, many of whom find it useful in providing assurance of quality control and satisfaction of customer needs.

BS5750 should be relevant to small companies as well as larger ones, and indeed many have found that it brings significant advantages in terms of greater efficiency and better quality control. There may, however, be circumstances in which specification of the standard would be inappropriate, and purchasers would be wise to ensure that the standard is not applied indiscriminately.

Environmental and Technological Development

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about his plans to amalgamate the DEMOS and ETIS schemes for assisting environmental and technological developments in industry; what the new scheme will be called; and how much money is likely to be available for it.

Mr. Eggar: The DEMOS and ETIS schemes will complete their three-year term in September 1993. The Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment are currently considering what future support might be appropriate to encourage innovation by industry in environmental technology. No decision has yet been taken. An announcement will be made should Departments proceed with any new scheme.

Sanitary Disposal Services

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet the Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association.

Mr. Eggar: None.

International Energy Agency Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what contribution was made by his Department to the International Energy Agency's recent report, "World Energy Outlook to 2010"; and what assessment he has made of the analysis adopted in the report on carbon dioxide emissions from the energy sector.

Mr. Eggar: The "World Energy Outlook to 2010" was produced as a background paper by the IEA secretariat to inform discussion at the IEA ministerial governing board meeting on the 4 June 1993. The IEA secretariat has presented its analysis to member countries at routine IEA meetings, though the report's conclusions are those of the IEA secretariat alone. My Department is examining the details of the report.

Nuclear Safeguards

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representation his Department had at the meeting of the European Safeguards Research and Development Association in the Vatican City in May.

Mr. Eggar: Two of my officials were present at the recent meeting of the European Safeguards Research and Development Association in the Vatican City in May.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Eggar: The Department of Trade and Industry has been the subject of one complaint, in August 1990, in relation to a reported breach of principle 7 (subject access),

of the Data Protection Act. Provisions to protect the confidentiality of complainants have prevented a full review of records in the time available. To date, no record has been identified of the complaint being referred to my Department for action.

If my continuing inquiries indicate to the contrary, I will respond further to the hon. Member.

Assisted Area Status

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *533*, what boundaries he intends to use in examining the constituent parts of London for consideration of designating assisted areas; and on what basis he will calculate figures for unemployment in those areas.

Mr. Sainsbury: In the review of the assisted areas map our consideration of large travel-to-work areas, including London, is taking into account relevant facts about all their constituent parts. Travel-to-work areas are the smallest areas for which reliable unemployment rates are available. We are, however, taking into account the unemployment data which are available at ward and local authority level, such as numbers of unemployed. The review consultation document made it clear that other criteria, including inner city and urban problems, will also be considered.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what impact assessment for dry cleaning businesses was carried out by his Department following the Montreal agreement on chlorofluorocarbons in terms of the costs involved and on the viability of such small businesses.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* It is for Departments leading negotiations, in this case the Department of the Environment, to assess the compliance costs of international commitments which have an impact on business. However, DTI commissioned a study into the use of CFCs as solvents in 1992 which highlighted a number of the implications for the dry cleaning sector of the early phasing-out of CFCs.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what notification has been given to dry cleaning businesses of the terms and implications of the Montreal protocol on chlorofluorocarbons for modification for replacement of machinery.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* My Department has publicised the impending phase-out of ozone-depleting substances since the launch of DTI's environment programme in 1989. In addition to regular meetings between officials and representatives of the dry cleaning sector, we have published a series of information leaflets on the issue and most recently distributed over 5,500 "fliers" directly to dry cleaners publicising the latest dates for CFC phase-out and the implications for dry cleaners using CFC 113.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial provision has been made for compensation for businesses, in each constituent part of the United Kingdom, for costs incurred in complying with the EC and United Kingdom measures implementing the terms of the Montreal agreement banning chlorofluorocarbons *(a)* overall and *(b)* in respect of dry cleaning businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* There is no general provision for funding investment in new equipment required to meet higher environmental standards; such subsidies would be contrary to the polluter pays principle. However, normal tax reliefs have been enhanced by the introduction of a 40 per cent. first year allowance for plant and machinery bought in the year ending 31 October 1993. Projects of regional or national benefit may be eligible for regional selective assistance where they create or maintain employment in the assisted areas.

Enterprise Initiative Scheme

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many firms in receipt of a grant under his Department's enterprise initiative scheme have gone into liquidation during the period covered by the grant; and if he will set out the total value of the relevant grants.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The DTI subsidy for assisted consultancy projects under the enterprise initiative is paid on project completion. Information on the liquidation of assisted companies is not collected.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps his Department takes to assess the financial viability of firms involved in his Department's enterprise initiative scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* As part of the free business review carried out under the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme, enterprise counsellors must establish that the applicant is financially viable and has sufficient funds to finance its share of a subsidised consultancy project. This involves scrutiny of the applicant's audited accounts, management accounts, assets and liabilities.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what studies his Department has undertaken of the effectiveness of small business support schemes delivered by training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The Department of Trade and Industry assumed responsibility for contracting with training and enterprise councils for the delivery of business support programmes on the 1 April 1993. As yet the Department has not undertaken any formal studies of their effectiveness, but plans to do so later in the year.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on which dates he met his European counterparts in the Council of Ministers in the last 12 months; and at which meetings the issue of intervention funding for the shipping industry was discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* In the last 12 months I represented the United Kingdom at

Industry Council meetings on four occasions, on 17 June and 24 November last year and on 19 and 20 March and 4 May this year. Support for the shipbuilding industry was discussed at the 17 June meeting last year and at both meetings this year.

ENVIRONMENT

Benefits Fraud

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has regarding the contracting out of benefits fraud investigation by local authorities.

Mr. Burt: I have been asked to reply.

Two local authorities have contracted out aspects of their benefit administration and two others are in the process of doing so. None has sought to contract out benefit fraud investigation.

We fully support authorities which decide to contract out elements of benefit administration that the law permits and we have issued guidance to all authorities which contains the following advice on benefit fraud investigation:

". . . Contractors should be alerted to the possibility of claimant fraud/abuse, and contracting out authorities are strongly advised to ensure that measures to detect and prevent fraud/abuse are made a contractual obligation. In view of the specialised nature of fraud investigation, the Department considers that, once the contractor's suspicions are aroused for any reason, full deteails should be passed immediately to the authority to conduct the investigation and direct further action, such as notifying the DSS District Office where Income Support or other Social Security benefits are in payment."

NORTHERN IRELAND

Protection Rackets

13. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been in Northern Ireland over the last five years on charges relating to protection rackets.

Mr. Mates: There have been 55 prosecutions and 39 convictions in the five years to 11 May 1993.

Constitutional Talks

14. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the present status of the inter-party talks concerning Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

18. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for all-party talks on the future governance and administration of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

22. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the possible resumption of the inter-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

23. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the resumption of talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

28. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current position of the inter-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had on the resumption of the talks process concerning the future of Northern Ireland.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick).

EC Water Directives

15. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the cost of implementing EC water directives in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Compliance with the EC directive on drinking water, urban waste water treatment and bathing water will require a total capital expenditure estimated at £622 million in the period up to 2005.

Ports Privatisation

16. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will announce his conclusions on the draft Ports (NI) Order 1993 following its consultation period; and how many representations he has received on the parliamentary procedure that should be applied to individual privatisation proposals.

Mr. Atkins: The consultation period ended on 2 April 1993 and I would hope to announce my conclusions by early summer. I have received a total of 52 representations during the consultation process, 18 of which concerned the parliamentary procedure for individual privatisation proposals.

Rural Planning

17. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will announce proposals relating to rural planning.

Mr. Atkins: An announcement will be made before the summer recess.

Casement Park Murders

19. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he is giving to referring to the Court of Appeal convictions arising from the Casement Park murders.

Mr. Mates: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations relating to the cases of three of those convicted—Mr. Patrick Kane, Mr. Michael Timmons and Mr. Sean Kelly. These, together with issues raised in the recent BBC TV "Rough Justice" programme which featured Mr. Kane's case, are currently being thoroughly examined to see whether or not there are grounds to justify a reference, the normal criterion for which is that there is some new evidence, or other consideration of substance, which has not already been before the courts and which casts doubt on the safety of the conviction. No representations have been received in respect of any other convictions relating to the events surrounding the Casement Park murders.

North America (Visit)

20. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his recent visit to North America.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In New York, Washington and Boston, I met a wide range of officials from the Administration, Congressional leaders and prominent Irish-Americans, as well as giving a series of television, radio and press interviews.

Tourism

21. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made on joint co-operation with the Republic of Ireland regarding tourism.

Mr. Atkins: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and its counterpart in the Republic of Ireland co-operate closely in areas of mutual benefit to tourism on the island of Ireland. Good progress continues on initiatives such as the international reservation systems covering all of Ireland, known as Gulliver, and with joint marketing activities. I have met my counterpart in the South twice since their general election and we are keen to find new areas for potential co-operation.

Religious Education

24. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are currently operating for the teaching of religious education in all schools; what percentage of the curriculum is devoted to the teaching of Christianity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: All schools are required to provide religious education for all pupils. In schools under the control of the education and library boards, such education must be undenominational and based on the Holy Scriptures. In voluntary schools religious education is under the control of the school managers. On a phased basis, beginning in September 1993, a core syllabus, approved by all the main churches in Northern Ireland and entirely Christian in content, will become compulsory for all schools, as part of the new statutory curriculum.

The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council has been asked to produce guidance for schools as to how a wider approach, incorporating study of other world religions, might be adopted and implemented within schools' total RE programme.

Legislation (Delays)

25. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he proposes to reduce delays between Acts of Parliament for England or Great Britain and the corresponding Orders in Council for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The Secretary of State is aware of the concerns which Northern Ireland MPs have expressed recently and we are continually looking at ways of minimising the time it takes to process legislation in Northern Ireland.

Care Homes

26. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the numbers of people in independent care homes and statutory homes at 31 January and 31 March.

Mr. Hanley: Approximately 2,921 and 12,247 beds were available in statutory and independent homes respectively at 31 January 1993, compared with approximately 2,735 and 12,852 at 31 March. It is not known how many of these beds were occupied on the dates in question.

Dyslexia

27. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many teachers of children requiring remedial education, in each education and library board area in Northern Ireland, have had specific training to enable them to identify children suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Hanley: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Nurses

29. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many nurses were employed in Northern Ireland *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* at the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

	31 March 1979		*31 March 1993*	
	Number	*Whole-time equivalent*	*Number*	*Whole-time equivalent*
Trained nurses	10,787	9,253·6	14,949	12,313·8
Other nurses	3,444	2,964·7	3,889	3,283·0
Student nurses	4,089	4,066·6	760	755·8
TOTAL	18,320	16,284·9	19,598	16,352·6

The figures for 1993 do not include 1,427 Project 2000 students.

Confessions (Access to Solicitors)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will introduce legislation to give people being interrogated by the Royal Ulster Constabulary the opportunity of access to a solicitor before signing any confession.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: No. The rights of those detained under the emergency legislation are already protected by extensive statutory safeguards. These include the right to consult with a solicitor, which can be delayed only in certain specified circumstances, and only for a maximum of 48 hours. Confessions are inadmissible if obtained by torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or the use or threat of violence. If prima facie evidence is adduced that the accused was subjected to such treatment, the onus is on the prosecution to satisfy the court that the statement was not improperly obtained. The courts also have a wide discretion to exclude a confession if it appears appropriate to do so in order to avoid unfairness to the accused or otherwise in the interests of justice.

Interrogation Centres

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will specify cases, including dates, of people who have been awarded compensation by Her Majesty's Government as a result of maltreatment by the RUC at Castlereagh interrogation centre.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The information is not available in the form requested. However, I have today placed in the Library of the House copies of a statistical analysis, prepared by the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, of claims for compensation concluded during the financial years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 arising from allegations relating to detention in holding centres.

The Police Authority paper shows that during this three year period 200 such claims were finalised. Most of the alleged incidents giving rise to these claims occurred during the period 1985-89, though some go back to the late 1970s. In 127 of the 200 cases assault was alleged.

Compensation was paid in 123 cases (62 per cent.). In only 27 of these, however, was alleged assault one of the grounds on which payment was made; payments in the remaining cases related to allegations of wrongful arrest, false imprisonment (including overholding), loss of property or other causes.

Of the 27 cases where payments were made on the basis of alleged assault, nine arose from incidents outside the holding centres themselves, including five from a single incident involving the use of plastic handcuffs. In only 18 cases, therefore, were damages paid where alleged assault inside a holding centre was a factor. These cases were, of course, dealt with on the civil burden of proof, assessed on the balance of probabilities, rather than the criminal standard of beyond reasonable doubt.

The total payment in cases in which alleged assault was found to be a factor was £69,900; the total payment in all others cases was £136,474.

The Government welcome the publication of this analysis, which confirms the impression of Lord Colville, recorded in his report of the operation in 1992 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991, that in only a small minority of cases arising from detention in the holding centres were damages paid on the basis of alleged assault. It also demonstrates how misleading has been much coverage of this issue, in the press and elsewhere.

It of course remains the firm position of both the Government and the RUC that any ill-treatment of persons in custody is wholly unacceptable. All complaints are investigated by the police, and the police investigation may be directly supervised by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. On completion of a supervised investigation a full report goes to the commission, which is required to issue a statement as to whether or not the investigation has been carried out satisfactorily. All completed files are in any event subject to ICPC scrutiny at the end of the investigation process. The paper may also be referred to the DPP. Any police officer acting improperly may face criminal or disciplinary proceedings.

The stringent safeguards already in place for those in detention have recently been reinforced by the appointment of an independent commissioner for the holding centres, and will shortly be strengthened still further by the introduction of codes of practice governing the detention, treatment, questioning and identification of terrorist suspects. The holding centres, and the police officers who work there, play a vital role in the struggle against terrorism. These measures are intended to enhance still further public confidence that the police have nothing to hide and that persons detained in holding centres are not being illtreated or denied their rights, and also to protect the officers themselves from malicious allegations.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will introduce legislation to enforce the video recording of interviews by the RUC at interrogation centres.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am not persuaded of the desirability of introducing video recording of interviews with terrorist suspects. There is already a formidable array of safeguards to guarantee that the rights of those detained under the emergency legislation are fully respected. These include the recent appointment of Sir Louis Blom-Cooper as independent commissioner for the holding centres.

"Making Belfast Work"

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all of the educational projects which have been funded by the "making Belfast work" programme in each of the last three years.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

The Department of Education (NI) making Belfast work 1990-91 programme

1. Principal Teachers' Training and Support in Primary and Secondary Schools
2. Belfast Citizen Advice Bureaux—Premises and Equipment
3. Mobile Science Gallery
4. Dairy Farm Library
5. Community Arts Outreach—Music
6. Youth Resource Centre—West Belfast
7. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
8. Action Sport
9. Youth Club Face Lift—various locations
10. Ozanam House—Youth Facility Building
11. Schools Links with Industry
12. Nursery Schools at New Barnsley, Twinbrook and Finaghy Road North
13. Nursery Schools at Lenadoon, Ardoyne, Glen Road and Cliftonville Primary School
14. Literacy/Numeracy in Primary Schools
15. Literacy/Numeracy in Secondary Schools
16. Literacy/Numeracy Further Education/Youth Training Programme
17. Literacy/Numeracy—Belfast Toy and Book Library
18. Newtownabbey Schools—Information Technology Equipment
19. Discipline in Schools
20. Homework Centres in certain Belfast schools
21. Additional Technology Support in Secondary Schools

22. Whiterock—Further Education Provision
23. Shankill Further Education Outcentre
24. Additional Equipment for Further Education Colleges
25. Workers Education Association
26. Women's Education Programme
27. Corpus Christi—Macrory Park Sports Facility
28. Corpus Christi refurbishment of school
29. Equipment for Boxing Clubs
30. Provision of Lap Top Computers in Secondary Schools

1991-92 Programme

1. Principal Teachers' Training and Support in Primary and Secondary Schools
2. Belfast Citizen Advice Bureaux—Premises and Equipment
3. Behavioural Unit at Robert Bell Primary School
4. Mobile Science Gallery
5. Dairy Farm Library
6. Community Arts Outreach—Music
7. Youth Resource Centre—West Belfast
8. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
9. Action Sport
10. Schools Links with Industry
11. Schools Links with European Industry
12. Nursery Schools at New Barnsley, Twinbrook and Finaghy Road North
13. Nursery Schools at Lenadoon, Ardoyne, Glen Road and Cliftonville Primary School
14. Nursery School at Twinbrook
15. Literacy/Numeracy in Primary Schools
16. Literacy/Numeracy Belfast Toy and Book Library
17. Literacy/Numeracy in Secondary Schools
18. Literacy/Numeracy Further Education/Youth Training Programme
19. Newtownabbey Schools—Information Technology Equipment
20. Discipline in Schools
21. Homework Centres in certain Belfast Schools
22. Liaison between Home Schools and Other Agencies
23. Support for Technology and Science in Secondary Schools
24. Enhanced Environment for Teaching Staff
25. Additional Technology Support in Secondary Schools
26. Whiterock—Further Education provision
27. Shankill Further Education Outcentre
28. Additional Equipment for Further Education Colleges
29. Workers Education Association
30. Women's Education Programme
31. Equipment for Boxing Clubs

1992-93 Programme

1. Principal Teachers' Training and Support in Primary and Secondary Schools
2. Belfast Citizen Advice Bureaux—Premises and Equipment
4. Behavioural Unit at Robert Bell Primary School
5. Information Technology Equipment for Special Schools
6. Mobile Science Gallery
7. Dairy Farm Library
8. Arts and Disability Centre
9. Youth Resource Centre—West Belfast
10. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme
11. Taughmonagh Youth Club
12. Action Sport
13. Belfast Bytes—computer awareness centre
14. Schools Links with Industry
15. Schools Links with European Industry
16. Nursery Schools at New Barnsley, Twinbrook and Finaghy Road North
17. Nursery Schools at Lenadoon, Ardoyne, Glen Road and Cliftonville Primary School
18. Nursery School at Brooklands Primary School Ballybeen
19. Nursery School at Twinbrook
20. Literacy/Numeracy in Primary Schools
21. Extension of Literacy/Numeracy in Primary Schools
22. Literacy/Numeracy Belfast Toy and Book Library
23. Literacy/Numeracy Ballybeen Toy and Book Library
24. Literacy/Numeracy in Secondary Schools
25. Extension of Literacy/Numeracy in Secondary Schools
26. Literacy/Numeracy Further Education/Youth Training Programme
27. Newtownabbey Schools—Information Technology Equipment
28. Discipline in Schools
29. Homework Centres in certain Belfast Schools
30. Liaison between Home Schools and Other Agencies
31. Support for Technology and Science in Secondary Schools
32. Enhanced Environment for Teaching Staff
33. Regeneration of Schools in the Inner-city
34. Technical Support in Science for Schools
35. Community Literacy Centres
36. Whiterock—Further Education provision
37. Shankill Further Education Outcentre
38. Dunlewey Street Further Education Outcentre
39. Educational Guidance Service for Adults
40. Belfast Centre for the Unemployed

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* maintained schools and *(b)* controlled schools are excluded from benefiting from "making Belfast work" expenditure in Belfast.

Mr. Hanley: Within the area of the Belfast education and library board, eight maintained schools and 25 controlled schools are excluded as they are outside the "making Belfast work" initiative catchment area.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent in each of the last three years by the "making Belfast work" programme on educational projects in Belfast.

Mr. Hanley: A total of £4·434 million was spent in 1990-91, £5·323 million in 1991-92 and £6·405 million in 1992-93.

Fair Employment

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of the fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The fair employment legislation in Northern Ireland is operating very well. More than 4,000 firms are registered with the Fair Employment Commission and are monitoring their work force composition. During 1993, over 1,500 companies are required to complete their first three-yearly review of employment practices. Where necessary, these companies will be required to take affirmative action.

The Fair Employment Tribunal offers real redress to people with a genuine grievance. A number of significant decisions and substantial awards and settlements have already been made.

The effectiveness of the law is to be formally reviewed by the Government in 1995.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Market Testing

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what market testing procedures have been undertaken by the Benefits Agency; and what has been their total cost.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of market testing within the Benefits Agency is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits

Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Richard Burden, dated 19 March 1993

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what market testing procedures have been undertaken by the Benefits Agency; and what has been their total cost.

Market testing is being carried on services within the Benefits Agency (BA) according to the plans published in the Citizen's Charter White Paper "Competing for Quality". Each service area being market tested within BA has to date undertaken the following procedures:

Set up Steering Groups.

Set up In-house and Client side teams.

Set up detailed monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Undertaken a feasibility study.

Developed their contract strategy.

As at 31 March 1993 the cost to BA of the market testing programme is £1,285,444.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also be placed in the Library.

Child Support Act

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of the tribunals set up as a result of the Child Support Act 1991 are *(a)* existing magistrates, *(b)* nominated by trade unions, *(c)* women, *(d)* lone parents and *(e)* under 30 years of age.

Mr. Burt: The independent tribunal service (ITS) has, to date, recruited 734 members under the provisions of the Child Support Act 1991. According to information available, 87 are existing magistrates, 102 have been nominated by trade unions, 363 are women, 36 lone parents and seven are under the age of 30.

As a matter of routine the ITS collects data only on the age and sex of its tribunal members. There may, therefore, be more magistrates, trade union nominees and lone parents than these figures indicate.

Benefits (Automated Credit Transfer)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, on automated credit transfer, what proposals his Department made during discussions with banks and building societies to encourage them to persuade pensioners and benefit recipients to open accounts with them; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have made no such proposals.

Residential Care

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made as to whether projects for people with drug and alcohol problems, previously funded by his Department, will be given contracts by social services departments.

Mr. Burt: This Department has never funded such projects although individual residents in homes which cater for such people may receive social security benefits. The negotiation of contracts for social care is a matter for social services departments acting under the guidance of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Pregnant Women

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to secure that the full adult rate of income support is paid to pregnant women between the ages of 16 and 24 years, provided that they are both available for work and registered for youth training.

Mr. Burt: We have no such plan.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* attendance allowance claims, *(b)* new disability living allowance claims and *(c)* top-up claims since February 1992 have (i) resulted in an award and (ii) been rejected; and if he will publish a breakdown in each case of whether the claim was decided solely on the statement of disability or whether a medical examination, other evidence or both were required;

(2) what were the average clearance times for *(a)* new claims, *(b)* top-up claims and *(c)* requests for review of disability living allowance at each disability benefit centre for each month since September 1992.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 19 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking (1) how many and what percentage of *(a)* attendance allowance claims, *(b)* new disability living allowance claims and *(c)* top-up claims since February 1992 have (i) resulted in an award and (ii) been rejected; and if he will publish a breakdown in each case of whether the claim was decided solely on the statement of disability or whether a medical examination, other evidence or both were required and (2) what were the average clearance times for *(a)* new claims, *(b)* top-up claims and *(c)* requests for review of disability living allowance at each disability benefit centre for each month since September 1992.

Number of claims made and decided.

You asked for the number of new claims and top-up claims for DLA together with the number and percentage of awards and refusals, including reasons for refusal. Annex 1 shows a breakdown of this information together with details of decisions based upon information provided on the claim form, medical examinations and other forms of evidence.

A further breakdown detailing claims to AA from 1.2.92 to date is shown at Annex 2.

National average clearance times.

Performance on DLA is measured in terms of X per cent., of cases cleared in Y days and it is therefore not possible to state an average processing time.

It may be helpful for me to say at this stage that new DLA claims are dealt with by the regional Disability Benefit Centres (DBC) Details of the clearance times for each DBC for each month between September 1992 and April 1993, inclusive of new claims and those made under the special rules are supplied at table I.

Top-up claims are dealt with by the Claims Conversion Unit (CCU).

A breakdown, therefore by DBCs is not available. I have provided details of available information regarding performance at table 2.

Finally, Disability Living Allowance reviews are dealt with by the Disability Living Allowance Unit (DLAU). No information is, therefore, available in respect of each DBC. Table 3, however provides details of review performance figures for the specified period.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the library.

Annex 1

1. Number of claims received
February 1992 to April 1993

	Number
New claims	562,000
Top-up claims	235,000
AA claims	671,000

2. Adjudication officer decisions
February 1992 to April 1993

	Number	As percentage
New DLA		
Awards	298,000	53
Refusals	228,000	41
Others[1]	36,000	6
Top-up Claims		
Awards	161,000	69
Refusals	47,000	20
Others[1]	27,000	12
AA Claims		
Awards	433,000	—
Refusals	133,000	—

[1] Others – this category includes claims withdrawn, defective claims and claims otherwise disposed of.

Note: AA statistics prior to April 1992 were kept on a quarterly basis and not monthly. Therefore it is not appropriate to give awards and refusals as a percentage of claims received. Due to rounding percentage figures do not always add up to 100 per cent.

3. Adjudication officer decision by evidence type

	New DLA claims		Top-up claims	
	Awards	Refusals	Awards	Refusals
Statement of disability				
Number	134,000	84,000	124,000	32,000
Percentage	45	37	77	69
Medical examination				
Number	64,000	44,000	18,000	4,000
Percentage	22	19	11	8
Other evidence				
Number	89,000	74,000	18,000	8,000
Percentage	30	33	11	17
Cases with unrecorded evidence type				
Number	11,000	25,000	2,000	3,000
Percentage	4	11	1	6

Annex 2

AA65+—May 1992—April 1993

		Awards	Refusals
Statement of Disability	Number	244,000	56,000
	Percentage	59	43
Medical Examination	Number	67,000	33,000
	Percentage	16	26
Other Evidence	Number	45,000	13,000
	Percentage	11	10
Cases with Unrecorded Evidence Type	Number	60,000	27,000
	Percentage	14	21

Note:—The breakdown of decisions by evidence type for AA are based on the period May 1992 to April 1993 as these statistics were not recorded prior to that period. The figures shown in this table will therefore not agree with those shown in table 2 which shows the number of adjudication officer decisions for the period April 1992 to April 1993. Due to rounding percentage figures do not always add up to 100 per cent.

Table 1

Primary Target for DLA normal rules cases in 60 per cent. in 30 days and for special rules 80 per cent. in 10 days. Secondary Target for DLA normal rules in 95 per cent. in 55 days and for special rules 90 per cent. in 55 days.

New claims for DLA
September 1992

	Normal rules Percentage cleared		Special rules Percentage cleared	
	in 30 days	in 55 days	in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	22	41	48	55
Newcastle	35	63	36	37
Leeds	44	66	83	90
Manchester	38	60	79	80
Bootle	27	52	66	74
Birmingham	21	39	30	37

	Normal rules Percentage cleared in 30 days	in 55 days	Special rules Percentage cleared in 10 days	in 15 days
Bristol	32	69	86	90
Cardiff	34	60	59	61
Wembley	36	63	91	92
Sutton	33	59	55	64
Glasgow	—	—	—	—
Great Britain	31	54	59	64

October 1992

	Normal rules Percentage cleared in 30 days	in 55 days	Special rules Percentage cleared in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	21	41	48	55
Newcastle	49	72	44	49
Leeds	51	71	80	89
Manchester	55	77	89	91
Bootle	38	62	78	86
Birmingham	30	46	37	42
Bristol	56	75	91	93
Cardiff	54	74	77	80
Wembley	45	68	91	92
Sutton	49	68	69	80
Glasgow	—	—	—	—
Great Britain	39	58	62	68

November 1992

	Normal rules Percentage cleared in 30 days	in 55 days	Special rules Percentage cleared in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	35	54	60	66
Newcastle	65	84	66	66
Leeds	65	82	80	90
Manchester	70	86	94	97
Bootle	51	75	82	87
Birmingham	38	55	55	63
Bristol	61	80	96	96
Cardiff	63	82	84	89
Wembley	56	77	93	96
Sutton	53	72	69	80
Glasgow	—	—	—	—
Great Britain	50	68	71	77

December 1992

	Normal rules Percentage cleared in 30 days	in 55 days	Special Rules Percentage cleared in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	49	70	66	73
Newcastle	73	87	87	88
Leeds	69	86	81	89
Manchester	74	90	94	96
Bootle	47	74	84	90
Birmingham	38	62	54	59
Bristol	70	86	89	92
Cardiff	66	86	83	88
Wembley	56	78	80	87
Sutton	55	75	75	81
Glasgow	—	—	—	—
Great Britain	55	75	73	80

January 1993

	Normal rules Percentage cleared in 30 days	in 55 days	Special Rules Percentage cleared in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	42	73	62	72
Newcastle	69	90	95	98
Leeds	62	85	83	89

	Normal rules Percentage cleared		Special Rules Percentage cleared	
	in 30 days	in 55 days	in 10 days	in 15 days
Manchester	67	87	92	95
Bootle	41	80	86	89
Birmingham	40	71	59	69
Bristol	52	83	87	91
Cardiff	60	84	83	87
Wembley	47	74	81	91
Sutton	49	76	82	90
Glasgow	—	—	—	—
Great Britain	49	76	76	83

February 1993

	Normal Rules Percentage cleared		Special Rules Percentage cleared	
	in 30 days	in 55 days	in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	62	78	81	85
Newcastle	85	96	92	94
Leeds	73	88	88	94
Manchester	81	92	93	97
Bootle	73	92	88	93
Birmingham	56	76	82	87
Bristol	72	89	93	96
Cardiff	74	87	88	91
Wembley	58	78	87	91
Sutton	57	74	91	95
Glasgow	65	85	—	—
Great Britain	61	77	85	90

March 1993

	Normal Rules Percentage cleared		Special Rules Percentage cleared	
	in 30 days	in 55 days	in 10 days	in 15 days
Edinburgh	69	83	82	90
Newcastle	87	98	99	99
Leeds	80	92	89	95
Manchester	83	94	94	96
Bootle	81	94	94	97
Birmingham	66	86	88	92
Bristol	86	96	96	97
Cardiff	85	94	90	93
Wembley	68	83	89	95
Sutton	61	77	84	91
Glasgow	62	85	75	75
Great Britain	71	85	85	90

Revised targets from 1 April 1993 for normal rules are Primary 65 per cent. in 30 days and Secondary 85 per cent. in 55 days. Only one target has been set from special rules cases 80 per cent. in 10 days.

April 1993

	Normal rules Percentage cleared		Special rules Percentage cleared	
	in 30 days	55 days	in 10 days	15 days
Edinburgh	76	96	92	96
Newcastle	87	98	95	97
Leeds	82	95	91	96
Manchester	86	97	92	94
Bootle	87	98	95	98
Birmingham	68	89	95	97
Bristol	81	97	94	95
Cardiff	78	93	84	91
Wembley	76	90	81	91
Sutton	67	86	83	89
Glasgow	67	92	68	71
Great Britain	75	91	88	93

Table 2
Performance indicators for top-up claims
Primary Target 60 per cent. in 55 days
Secondary Target 95 per cent. in 75 days

	Normal rules Percentage cleared		*Special rules Percentage cleared*	
	in 55 days	*in 75 days*	*in 10 days*	*in 20 days*
1992				
September	15	22	8	17
October	28	36	16	26
November	37	44	17	33
December	43	49	26	53
1993				
January	46	55	18	35
February	57	64	36	52
March	57	63	27	50
April	71	76	21	44

Table 3
Performance indicators for reviews
Primary Target 60 per cent in 55 days
Secondary Target 95 per cent in 75 days
Secondary Target 80 per cent. in 75 days (from 1 April 1993)[1]

	Reviews made in 3 months Percentage cleared		*Reviews outside 3 months Percentage cleared*	
	in 55 days	*75 days*	*in 55 days*	*75 days*
1992				
September	35	61	6	10
October	30	50	46	60
November	23	40	53	65
December	18	36	40	53
1993				
January	11	24	30	47
February	11	25	31	48
March	18	29	39	51
April[1]	33	47	43	61

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received in relation to the payment of claims made under the disability working allowance.

Mr. Scott: We have received two letters from customers.

Income Support

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* applications and *(b)* payments for income support were made in each month since April 1990 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Great Britain.

Mr. Burt *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The information is in the tables.

Source: Benefits Agency Management Information Statistics.

Table 1
Income Support
Number of claims received

Year and month	*Scotland*	*England*	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
1990				
April	28,169	225,587	16,526	270,282
May	29,907	242,903	16,992	289,802
June	37,346	240,918	17,659	295,923
July	44,497	342,412	27,174	414,083
August	38,106	308,532	21,765	368,403
September	31,456	275,582	20,179	327,217
October	37,292	311,112	22,332	370,736
November	34,559	301,536	20,806	356,901
December	26,234	219,458	14,398	260,090
1991				
January	37,589	348,191	24,013	409,793
February	33,880	316,821	20,466	371,167
March	32,084	304,012	18,843	354,939
April	33,415	302,477	19,124	355,016
May	31,500	288,788	17,957	338,245

Year and month	Scotland	England	Wales	Great Britain
June	33,717	280,075	17,295	331,087
July	42,008	379,262	25,504	446,774
August	34,245	308,873	19,226	362,344
September	33,686	318,382	21,634	373,702
October	37,771	337,611	22,267	397,649
November	34,376	308,834	20,415	363,625
December	26,826	240,685	16,509	284,020
1992				
January	42,420	378,328	23,475	444,223
February	33,876	305,785	18,153	357,814
March	35,041	319,345	20,236	374,622
April	35,442	306,390	19,435	361,267
May	31,334	261,820	15,609	308,763
June	38,142	304,500	18,485	361,127
July	45,984	389,330	26,113	461,427
August	35,050	299,169	18,606	352,825
September	38,465	344,893	23,421	406,779
October	44,033	360,429	23,629	428,091
November	41,073	329,517	20,386	390,976
December	32,563	260,609	16,357	309,529
1993				
January	35,783	329,675	20,661	386,119
February	31,861	274,720	16,422	323,003
March	33,983	295,642	18,265	347,890

Table 2
Income Support
Number of awards made

Year and month	Scotland	England	Wales	Great Britain
1990				
April	22,831	168,292	12,197	203,320
May	24,585	190,800	13,446	228,831
June	30,775	189,563	13,423	233,761
July	39,824	271,378	22,726	333,928
August	32,781	258,436	18,209	309,426
September	26,731	226,866	16,633	270,230
October	31,708	255,825	18,503	306,036
November	29,455	245,446	17,005	291,896
December	21,590	172,703	11,689	205,982
1991				
January	32,379	284,350	19,416	336,145
February	27,832	257,467	16,386	301,685
March	26,550	245,180	14,715	286,445
April	26,950	246,972	15,311	289,233
May	26,370	244,353	14,875	285,598
June	28,134	236,483	14,527	279,144
July	36,575	320,408	21,484	378,467
August	29,151	268,283	16,269	313,703
September	28,629	274,744	18,366	321,739
October	32,770	292,787	19,282	344,839
November	29,408	263,167	17,281	309,856
December	23,485	204,542	13,607	241,634
1992				
January	36,884	323,617	19,797	380,298
February	28,878	262,052	15,185	306,115
March	29,561	267,826	16,252	313,639
April	30,492	258,257	16,176	304,935
May	26,737	228,800	13,084	268,621
June	32,614	257,926	14,899	305,439
July	40,148	337,261	22,387	399,796
August	30,592	261,956	15,794	308,342
September	32,575	295,457	19,314	347,346
October	36,535	305,043	18,850	361,428
November	34,388	284,084	17,637	336,109
December	28,121	227,863	14,090	270,074
1993				
January	31,217	284,892	17,277	333,386
February	27,323	240,638	13,877	281,838
March	29,007	252,545	14,775	296,327

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support recipients aged *(a)* between 18 and 21 years and *(b)* 21 and 24 years live with one or more of their parents.

Mr. Burt: *[holding answer 10 May 1993]:* It is estimated that in 1991 there were 250,000 18 to 21-year-olds and 100,000 22 to 24-year-olds receiving the single person rate of income support and living with one or more of their parents.

Sources:

1. Caseload estimates for the total number of 18 to 24-year-olds on income support from the 1991 Annual Statistical Enquiry.
2. Information 18 to 24-year-olds living with a parent was obtained using evidence from the 1989-90-91 Family Expenditure Surveys (modelled at 1993-94 prices and benefit levels).

WALES

Small Businesses

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the number of people employed, *(b)* the number of start-ups and *(c)* the average pre-tax turnover, for small businesses in Wales for each year since 1983.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the numbers of employees employed in units of different size is available for 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991 from the size-band analyses of the censuses of employment and given in the following summary table:

Employees in employment in Wales, by size of unit[1] (thousands)

	Size of unit (employees)		
September	*1-49*	*50-199*	*200 and over*
1984	356·1	189·4	319·5
1987	364·6	204·2	334·1
1989	413·4	209·8	343·9
1991	439·3	217·4	287·2

Source: Size-band analyses of Censuses of Employment. Employment Department (via NOMIS).
[1] Excluding agriculture.

New VAT registrations give an indication of the number of business start-ups for each year. Firms with a turnover of less than £1 million each year account for over 96 per cent. of the total.

Number of new VAT registrations

Year	*Number*
1983	8,044
1984	7,609
1985	7,264
1986	7,811
1987	8,682
1988	10,873
1989	10,916
1990	10,165
1991	8,408

Source: NOMIS

The following tables give an indication of the distribution of turnover between units, grouped by size, in Wales. Information prior to 1989 is not readily available and the size bands published were changed in 1991.

Number of units, by turnover size
Size of unit: turnover

£	*1989*	*1990*
22,000-100,000[1]	44,055	44,762
101,000-250,000	13,635	14,820
251,000-1,000,000	7,208	8,127
1,001,000 and over	2,735	3,070

Source: PA 1003 Size analyses of United Kingdom businesses. Business Monitor, Central Statistical Office.
[1] £23,000-£100,000 in 1990

Number of units, by turnover size

	1991	*1992*
Size of unit: Turnover		
£1,000–25,000	N/a	16,008
£26,000–£99,000[1]	41,709	36,130
£100,000–£249,000	16,986	17,223
£250,000–£999,000	9,107	9,430
£1,000,000 and over	3,467	3,486

[1] £24,000–£99,000 in 1991.

Source: PA 1003 Size analyses of United Kingdom businesses. Business Monitor, Central Statistical Office.

Self-employed People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of self-employed people in each local authority area in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will indicate *(a)* the total number of self-employed and *(b)* the number of self-employed who were not on the Department of Social Security's books.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the number of self-employed people in each local authority area in Wales is available only from the 1991 population census and published in part 1 of the country reports (CEN 91 CR 47 to 54 for Welsh districts and counties) available in the Library of the House. Information on self-employed persons in receipt of benefits is not available for local authority areas.

Mortgage Arrears

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on *(a)* the total number of mortgages held in Wales, *(b)* the number of mortgages between 3 and 5 months in arrears, *(c)* the number of mortgages between 6 and 12 months in arrears, *(d)* the number of mortgages over 12 months in arrears and *(e)* the number of repossessions in each year from 1981.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the total number of mortgages held in Wales and on mortgage arrears are not available centrally. However, according to the 1991 census of population there were in April 1991, 440,584 owner-occupied dwellings with residents where the dwelling was being purchased through a mortgage or loan. This includes those who were buying in stages from a council, housing association or new town (under shared ownership, co-ownership or equity-sharing schemes).

For repossessions, information is only available for the numbers of repossession orders made following mortgage possession actions entered in county courts in Wales from 1987 and is shown in the following table. The figures do not indicate how many dwellings have been repossessed through the courts as not all the orders will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession.

Repossession orders made following mortgage actions[1]

	Number
1987	2,978
1988	3,058
1989	2,799
1990	4,962
1991	7,415
[2]1992	7,076

Source: Lord Chancellor's Office
[1] Figures include suspended orders, whereby the mortgagers are given an opportunity to clear their debts.
[2] Provisional

Neurofibromatosis

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to what studies are being undertaken by hospitals and medical research institutes in Wales on neurofibromatosis.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: As part of an international effort, a research team at the Institute of Medical Genetics, Cardiff is seeking to isolate the defective gene that causes neurofibromatosis.

Development Partnership, Llanelli

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the partnership accounts of the partnership between the Welsh Development Agency and Llanelli borough council established for the purpose of developing the south Llanelli area.

Mr. David Hunt: Each of the parties to the joint venture account for and report their expenditure separately in the normal way. There are no formal accounts for the joint venture as a whole.

Eye Examinations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many eye examinations were carried out in Wales in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information collected centrally relates to sight tests paid for by family health services committees. No information is available centrally on the number of private sight tests carried out.

Sight tests paid for by FHSAs[1]

	Number
1985	596,778
1986	623,088
1987	651,175
1988-89	733,469
1989-90	292,060
1990-91	271,170
1991-92	332,240

[1] Sight test paid for during the period (ie the test may have taken place in the previous period).

Dead Stock (Disposal)

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to end the disposal of dead stock to unlicensed premises in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The disposal of dead stock is covered by the Animal By-Products Order 1992. Carcases not destined for human consumption must be buried, incinerated or disposed of in premises which are approved under article 8 or registered under article 10 of the order, or to knacker yards licensed by local authorities under the Slaughterhouses Act 1974.

Fox Destruction Clubs

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to regulate unregistered fox destruction clubs in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of disabled persons employed by each local authority in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Tables showing the number and percentage of registered disabled people employed by a wide range of individual public sector employers, including local authorities, are published annually in the *Employment Gazette*. The information is published with the agreement of the employers concerned. The most recent figures, relating to 1 June 1992, were published in the April 1993 issue of the *Gazette*, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of hydatidosis were recorded in Wales in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of deaths and discharges from NHS hospitals in Wales for which a diagnosis of hydatidosis was recorded is given in the following table for the years 1981-90.

Year	*Deaths/ Discharges*
1981	27
1982	26
1983	32
1984	34
1985	25
1986	31
1987	25
1988	12
1989	17
1990	19

This information is obtained from individual hospital activity analysis records. Figures for recent years may differ from those released previously as more information has become available. The figures may still understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths. Corresponding data for 1991 and 1992 are not yet available centrally on an all-Wales basis.

Pharmacies

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress regarding the negotiations for the remuneration of community pharmacists in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I am very well aware of the contribution small pharmacies make to the local community. The current system of remuneration is unsatisfactory because it is poorly targeted and gives indiscriminate support to pharmacies regardless of the wider contribution they make to the health service. We want to move to a system which, within the overall sum available, will remunerate all pharmacists fairly, is related to their performance in developing a wider health role and which provides an incentive to cost-efficiency. At the same time, there is a need to provide more comprehensive support to pharmacies which provide an essential service to their communities.

Both pharmacists and health departments are committed to the concept that there should be an allowance to relate the remuneration more closely to the development of a wider professional role. The offer includes a proposal for the payment of a professional allowance to recognise the wider health role of pharmacists. The details are for negotiation with the pharmacists' representatives.

The pay offer made this year was a first step towards a longer term structure. The proposal included a transitional payment which would have left pharmacies no worse off than in 1992-93.

Negotiations continue and the pharmacists want to see more clearly the framework for the future before settling details of the year's pay.

Unemployment

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing *(a)* total unemployment rates, *(b)* unemployment rates among males and *(c)* unemployment rates among females according to ethnic origin in Wales, indicating the rates of unemployment for (i) whites, (ii) West Indians/Guyanese, (iii) Indians, (iv) Pakistani/Bangladeshi people, (v) African people and (vi) all other ethnic origins.

Mr. David Hunt: The information available from the 1991 census is given in the following table:

Unemployed residents aged 16 and over as a percentage of economically active residents in each ethnic group in Wales

Ethnic group[1]	*Persons*	*Males*	*Females*
White	10·1	12·6	6·6
Black Caribbean	21·3	27·7	11·5
Black African	28·0	31·9	21·2
Black other	23·0	28·0	16·0
Indian	9·3	8·7	10·2
Pakistani and Bangladeshi	20·3	19·9	21·5
Other	13·7	15·2	11·1
All ethnic groups	10·1	12·6	6·7

[1]A definition of the ethnic group classification used in the 1991 census is given in 1991 Census "Definitions", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been out of work in Wales, in each of the counties of Wales and each of the constituencies of Wales for *(a)* five years, *(b)* four years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* two years, *(e)* one year and *(f)* six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: All available unemployment claimant figures can be accessed on-line by staff in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the change in the level of unemployment between *(a)* February 1983 and February 1993 and *(b)* February 1984 and February 1993; and when he expects to make a statement on the new assisted area status map of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Between February 1983 and February 1993, unemployment in Wales, adjusted for seasonal factors and discontinuities, fell by 19,900 to 132,100 a drop of 13·1 per cent. The decrease between February 1984 and February 1993 was 24,900, a drop of 15·9 per cent.

I hope to be able to announce the outcome of the assisted areas review as soon as possible.

School Tests

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the publication, or otherwise, of the results of key stage 1 and 3 tests in schools this year; and what percentage of schools he expects to carry out these tests.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It remains my intention to publish available national data arising from this year's statutory assessment of seven and 14-year-olds. I wrote recently to the chairmen of governors of all maintained schools in Wales encouraging the participation of their schools in the tests. I hope that they will do so in order that the information can usefully inform the current review of the national curriculum which, is being carried out jointly by the Curriculum Council for Wales and the School Examinations and Assessment Council.

EC Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of grants received from the European Community, by each local authority in Wales in 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has not been subject to any investigations by the Data Protection Registrar.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 21 May 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has not been the subject of any investigations by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle.

All computer systems within the Lord Chancellor's Department comply fully with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984, as will all future systems.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals there were against a refusal of *(a)* a variation or extension of leave to remain in the United Kingdom, *(b)* entry clearance abroad, *(c)* entry to the country, *(d)* removal as an illegal entrant and *(e)* a decision to deport a person and the refusal to revoke a deportation order; and what the results were of these appeals.

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* The information requested was as follows during the period 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993:

Appeals to Immigration Adjudicators

	Received[1]	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*
(a)	8,333	229	5,573	2,171
(b)	13,882	3,845	15,752	3,458
(c)	105	53	425	46
(d) and *(e)*[2]	1,656	33	963	275

[1]The number of appeals received does not equal those allowed, dismissed and withdrawn as the latter categories include appeals received before 1 April 1992 and determined during 1992-93.

[2]The Immigration Appellate Authorities do not record separate figures for appeals against removal as an illegal entrant and these appeals are recorded with those at *(e)*.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Schemes (Accidents)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* fatal, *(b)* major and *(c)* minor accidents have occurred on youth training, employment training and employment action in each region and in Great Britain as a whole in each quarter since March 1990; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Table A gives the accident figures for 1990;

Table B gives the accident figures for 1991;

Table C gives the accident figures for 1992; and

Table D gives the figures for the first quarter of 1993.

Notes:

1. Employment Department figures for trainees have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for employed persons. However, the Employment Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments, and road traffic accidents, which would not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.
2. Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.
3. Employment Action was launched in October 1991. Accident statistics for Employment Action are included from the quarter ending December 1991.
4. Eastern Region was formed during quarter ending 30 September 1992. North West Region was split into two during quarter ending 30 September 1992. Accident records for Scotland were split between Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise from the quarter ending 30 September 1991.

Table A: 1990 accident figures

Region	*YT*			*ET*			*EA*		
	Fatal	*Major*	*Minor*	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*
Quarter ending 30 June 1990									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	9	48	—	—	15	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	27	89	—	8	31	—	—	—
Northern	—	11	87	—	9	41	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	22	78	—	10	57	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	14	82	—	2	28	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	26	65	—	5	23	—	—	—
Wales	—	13	46	—	7	23	—	—	—
South West	—	16	26	—	3	16	—	—	—
South East	—	14	37	—	3	19	—	—	—

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
London	—	5	16	—	2	6	—	—	—
National	—	157	574	—	49	259	—	—	—
Quarter ending 30 September 1990									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	1	10	27	—	2	18	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	13	59	1	8	35	—	—	—
Northern	—	9	62	—	8	47	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	11	60	—	7	43	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	17	83	—	7	15	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	9	49	—	5	21	—	—	—
Wales	—	4	34	1	3	15	—	—	—
South West	—	6	23	—	1	12	—	—	—
South East	—	5	28	—	3	9	—	—	—
London	—	3	12	—	—	—	—	—	—
National	1	87	437	2	44	215	—	—	—
Quarter ending 31 December 1990									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	14	46	—	2	19	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	20	94	—	10	25	—	—	—
Northern	—	14	88	—	16	43	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	14	74	—	10	49	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	22	88	1	3	28	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	7	55	—	2	21			
Wales	—	10	56	—	12	20	—	—	—
South West	—	2	20	—	2	5	—	—	—
South East	—	8	19	—	1	10	—	—	—
London	—	2	15	—	2	6			
National	—	113	555	1	60	226	—	—	—

Table B: 1991 accident figures

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
Quarter ending 31 March 1991									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	4	27	—	1	7	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	1	7	33	—	2	15	—	—	—
Northern	—	15	69	—	5	33	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	9	32	—	7	33	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	25	74	—	10	23	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	5	28	—	3	9	—	—	—
Wales	1	16	42	—	6	21	—	—	—
South West	1	8	27	—	2	8	—	—	—
South East	—	8	20	—	4	5	—	—	—
London	—	3	7	—	—	2	—	—	—
National	3	100	359	—	40	156	—	—	—
Quarter ending 30 June 1991									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	6	24	—	2	9	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	11	32	—	1	16	—	—	—
Northern	—	8	67	—	3	32	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	11	47	—	4	24	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	18	52	—	6	16	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	10	49	—	3	23	—	—	—
Wales	—	8	34	—	4	15	—	—	—
South West	—	5	14	—	—	4	—	—	—
South East	—	8	22	—	3	14	—	—	—
London	—	2	12	—	3	1	—	—	—
National	—	87	353	—	29	154	—	—	—

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
Quarter ending 30 September 1991									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	7	35	—	2	5	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	12	45	—	2	10	—	—	—
Northern	—	13	80	—	3	34	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	17	64	—	3	24	—	—	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	17	63	—	6	10	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	8	44	—	1	7	—	—	—
Wales	—	4	30	—	3	14	—	—	—
South West	—	6	17	—	1	4	—	—	—
South East	1	6	23	—	1	5	—	—	—
London	—	2	2	—	—	2	—	—	—
National	1	92	403	—	22	115	—	—	—
Quarter ending 31 December 1991									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	7	39	—	4	5	—	—	2
Highlands/Islands	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	17	67	—	5	19	—	—	—
Northern	—	7	59	—	1	27	—	—	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	12	81	—	3	28	—	1	—
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	—	11	64	—	6	12	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	17	52	—	5	12	—	—	1
Wales	—	9	34	—	2	11	—	—	—
South West	—	6	23	—	2	6	—	—	1
South East	—	9	19	—	—	6	—	1	—
London	—	4	7	—	1	2	—	—	—
National	—	99	446	—	29	128	—	2	5

Table C: 1992 accident figures

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
Quarter ending 31 March 1992									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	6	42	—	3	5	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	9	49	—	2	14	—	—	—
Northern	—	6	47	—	3	20	—	—	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	8	55	—	4	16	—	—	3
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	1	13	62	—	1	16	—	—	6
West Midlands	—	6	45	—	3	9	—	2	3
Wales	—	7	37	—	1	13	—	—	5
South West	—	2	20	—	—	5	—	—	1
South East	—	6	19	—	1	1	—	1	2
London	—	3	17	—	—	2	—	—	—
National	1	66	395	—	18	101	—	3	22
Quarter ending 30 June 1992									
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eastern	—	5	20	—	1	6	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	14	44	—	2	10	—	—	2
Northern	—	5	23	—	3	11	—	1	3
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	7	38	—	—	16	—	3	10
North West West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North West East	1	8	24	—	1	8	—	2	1
West Midlands	—	6	26	—	1	6	—	1	—
Wales	—	1	24	—	2	18	—	2	2
South West	—	2	29	—	1	8	—	—	1
South East	—	3	21	—	—	2	—	1	2
London	—	4	1	—	2	—	—	—	—
National	1	55	250	—	13	85	—	10	21
Quarter ending 30 September 1992									
East Midlands	—	5	25	—	—	10	—	—	1

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
Eastern	—	2	11	—	—	—	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	11	37	—	6	18	—	—	2
Northern	—	3	60	—	1	21	—	—	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	18	63	—	3	12	—	1	10
North West West	—	13	25	—	—	3	—	—	1
North West East	—	5	10	—	—	4	—	—	1
West Midlands	—	13	34	—	3	9	—	—	2
Wales	—	9	39	—	1	16	—	2	7
South West	—	7	27	1	2	6	—	—	2
South East	—	3	18	—	1	6	—	—	1
London	—	7	10	—	—	—	—	—	—
National	—	96	359	1	17	105	—	3	29
Quarter ending 31 December 1992									
East Midlands	—	6	33	—	2	5	—	—	2
Eastern	—	2	10	—	—	1	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	5	35	—	3	23	—	2	2
Northern	—	5	48	—	1	14	—	—	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	13	72	—	7	33	—	3	9
North West West	—	7	33	—	—	1	—	2	2
North West East	—	6	24	—	2	5	—	1	2
West Midlands	—	13	42	—	6	11	—	—	1
Wales	—	6	33	—	6	17	—	—	15
South West	—	4	30	—	1	4	—	—	1
South East	—	4	18	—	2	4	—	—	1
London	—	5	7	—	—	2	—	—	2
National	—	76	385	—	31	120	—	8	39

Table D: 1993 accident figures

Region	YT Fatal	YT Major	YT Minor	ET Fatal	ET Major	ET Minor	EA Fatal	EA Major	EA Minor
Quarter ending 31 March 1993									
East Midlands	—	5	29	—	—	5	—	1	1
Eastern	—	4	16	—	2	3	—	—	2
Highlands/Islands	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scot Enterprise	—	6	35	1	1	9	—	1	2
Northern	—	4	42	—	5	12	—	1	5
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	12	62	—	1	29	—	—	6
North West West	—	6	26	—	1	7	—	—	2
North West East	—	2	19	—	3	3	—	—	2
West Midlands	—	7	42	—	1	10	—	—	3
Wales	—	2	36	—	4	7	—	—	5
South West	—	5	27	—	—	7	—	1	1
South East	—	3	21	—	2	—	—	—	7
London	—	4	13	—	1	1	—	—	1
National	—	63	368	1	21	93	—	4	37

Pregnant Women's Rights

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been allocated by her Department towards publicity campaigns for 1992 and 1993 to explain to employers and employees their obligations and rights with regard to the employment rights of pregnant women.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department publicises employment rights for pregnant women principally through the advice leaflet "Employment Rights for the Expectant Mother".

The cost of producing and distributing this booklet in 1992-93 was £2,378, and the allocation for 1993-94 is £2,615. I will send a copy of the booklet to the hon. Member.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column *85*, if he will provide details of the evidence upon which he bases his estimate of the percentage savings arising from market testing in previous years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The annual reports by the central unit on purchasing on progress in Government procurement for the four years to March 1991, provide information on Departments' progress with market testing. This information, which includes savings, is derived from returns provided by Departments themselves. The annual reports are in the House Library.

No report on market-testing progress was complied for 1991-92. I shall report on the current period which runs to 30 September 1993 as soon as possible after that date.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General to what investigations his Departments have been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Departments to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

The Attorney-General: None of the Law Officers' Departments has been the subject of an investigation by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current annual spending on family credit; and what was the spending on family income support in 1979.

Mr. Burt: Family credit expenditure for 1992-93 was £864 million. This is 36 times more than the £24 million spent on family income supplement in 1978-79 in cash terms and 13 times more in real terms.

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the total cost to the Exchequer of paying a Christmas bonus to pensioners in the year 1992-93 had such bonus been increased annually since 1972 in line with prices.

Miss Widdecombe: The Christmas bonus would now be worth £62·30 had it been increased annually since 1972 in line with prices. To pay it at this rate to 12·7 million beneficiaries in 1992-93 would cost £791 million.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentages of newly retired *(a)* men and *(b)* women were entitled to payments from the state earnings-related pension scheme in each year since SERPS pensions were first available.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is in the table.

Percentage of awards of retirement pension containing serps[1]

	Men	*Women*[2]
April 1979—November 1979	44·1	7·1
December 1979—May 1980	55·3	12·5
June 1980—June 1981	62·5	14·9
July 1981—November 1981	69·7	15·2
December 1981—May 1982	74·2	18·1
June 1982—September 1982	74·6	18·9
October 1982—March 1983	77·5	19·2
April 1983—September 1983	80·1	19·9
October 1983—March 1984	79·0	18·7
April 1984—March 1985	86·9	23·6
April 1985—September 1985	88·0	23·5
October 1985—March 1986	89·1	24·1
April 1986—September 1986	91·7	29·0
October 1986—September 1987	91·9	29·3
October 1987—March 1988	92·4	29·6
April 1988—September 1988	92·8	33·7
October 1988—March 1989	92·1	32·9
April 1989—March 1990[3]	91·8	46·2
April 1990—March 1991[3]	92·1	49·0
April 1991—March 1992[3]	91·8	52·5

Notes:

[1] Includes men and women who receive SERPS through either an Additional Pension or a Contracted-Out Scheme.

[2] Includes all categories-Category A derived from contributors own contributions; Category ABL—derived from both the contributor's and her husband's contributions; Category B—derived from husband's contributions only. No SERPS is paid on Category B pensions.

[3] Up to March 1989 the proportions are derived from all new claims to contributory Retirement Pension regardless of age. From April 1989 they are based on claims by men aged 65 and women aged 60, so that claims deferred for more than a year and some claims for Category B pension are excluded. In order to match up the two series, the proportion of men with entitlement to SERPS from April 1989 onwards should be increased by about 1 percentage point and the proportion of women reduced by about 10 percentage points.

Compensation Scheme

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the clearance target for each social security benefit which will be used in the calculation of the new compensation scheme announced on 4 May.

Miss Widdecombe: The target clearance times relevant to the revised arrangements announced on 4 May are as follows:

Benefit	*Clearance target*[1]
Social Fund Crisis Loans	[2]
Social Fund Community Care Grants	20 days
Income Support—Claims	13 days
Sickness and Invalidity Benefit	30 days
Child Benefit	30 days
Family Credit	42 days
Disability Living Allowance	55 days
Disability Working Allowance (Claims from people starting work)	5 days
Retirement Pension	60 days

[1] Shown as working days.

[2] On the day need arises.

The clearance targets which will be used in the cases of those benefits which do not have secondary clearance times are being considered. Where the clearance target would mean a customer having to wait longer than the 12 month period which was applicable to the arrangements before 1 April 1993, a notional target of six months will be used.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the clearance target used to calculate compensation under the scheme announced on 4 May will be the target for the year the payment should have been made, the target for the year the payment was finally made or the target for some other year.

Miss Widdecombe: The target clearance time used to calculate compensation which may be due under the revised arrangements announced on 4 May will be the clearance target relevant to the date payment of the arrears of benefit are made.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the full rules governing the award and calculation of compensation in the new compensation scheme for late payment of social security benefits announced on 4 May.

Miss Widdecombe: The criteria under which payment of compensation is considered when a payment of a new claim for a social security benefit is delayed are:

(i) The delay must be because of official error;
(ii) The arrears due must be for £50 or more; and
(iii) The delay must be for at least six months plus the relevant target for clearing the bulk of claims—usually between 85 and 95 per cent.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he wil publish a leaflet for the public setting out the rules governing the new compensation scheme for late payment of social security benefits announced on 4 May; and if he will include in it the clearance targets which are relevant for each benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's clearance targets, which relate to the revised arrangements, are published in the Benefits Agency business plan.

All district offices display details of national targets in their reception areas, and customers will be able to obtain details of the relevant clearance targets from the customer service manager at their local office.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland flag

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *553-54*, by what Act or instrument the Government of Northern Ireland adopted the Northern Ireland flag; and for what purpose it was adopted.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The official flag of Northern Ireland is the Union flag. In 1924, the Government of Northern Ireland was granted arms by royal warrant and had the right to display these arms on a flag or banner. In 1953, they exercised this right by giving assent to the flying of such a flag, known as the "Ulster Banner", on festive occasions.

Terrorism

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost of compensation paid out for loss of property by fire and explosion in terrorist incidents over the last three years.

Mr. Mates: Responsibility for the subject in question is a matter for the Compensation Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. Robinson. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. Robinson to Rev. Martin Smyth, dated 20 May 1993:

I refer to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the cost of compensation paid for loss of property in terrorist incidents. The Secretary of State has asked me to respond.

Compensation paid in the 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93 financial years in respect of claims for damage to property caused by fire and explosion in terrorist incidents amounted to £19·37 million, £29·07 million and £64·1 million respectively. The figures do not include applicants' fees and costs.

I hope this is helpful.

Rate Collection Agency

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what performance targets have been set for the Rate Collection Agency in 1993-94.

Mr. Atkins: For 1993-94, the following performance targets have been set for the agency:—

1. To reduce rating debt to 1·83 per cent. of the gross collectable rate, excluding late assessments, by 31 March 1994.
2. To achieve a reduction of 2 per cent. in the real value of the unit costs of collecting rates per hereditament.
3. To generate refunds to 96 per cent. of ratepayers so entitled within 14 days of credits being identified.
4. To process by 31 March 1994, 94 per cent. of applications for the incoming year received from existing housing benefit recipients before 15 March 1994.
5. To achieve a reduction of 1·8 per cent. in the real value of unit costs of processing housing benefit cases.
6. To assess 96 per cent. of housing benefit claims free of error.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide details of the key performance targets for 1993-94 which have been set for Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: The key performance targets for the period 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994 which have been set for Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland are as follows:

to survey 30,484 house units in the continuous revision programme;
to complete 800 data capture units representing 1,429 basic scale map sheets converted to digital format;
to update the digital topographical database with 90 per cent. of the surveyed change within seven days of receipt of the field data;
to dispatch within seven working days 90 per cent. of orders for folded and basic scale maps;
to reduce unit costs so that the weighted mean percentage reduction of selected representative activities is 2 per cent.;
to recover, from the supply of goods and services, 21 per cent. of the total costs incurred by the agency.

WALES

Local Authorities (Payment of Bills)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to encourage or require local authorities to pay their bills on time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The prompt payment of bills by local authorities is a matter for them and I have no power to intervene. However, the Government expect the public sector generally to follow best practice and to pay its bills within the agreed credit period or, where no such period has been agreed, 30 days. The payment performance of Government Departments is regularly monitored and Government contracts now include a requirement for sub-contractors to be paid promptly.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to control the spread of hydatidosis in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: The Welsh Office has been providing funds to Powys health authority since 1989 for a five-year public education campaign on hydatid disease. The disease is generally most prevalent in sheep farming areas and the aim of this campaign is to reduce the incidence of hydatid disease through increased public awareness and the encouragement of preventive measures. Total funding to the end of 1992-93 is £119,000. Resources have been set aside to fund the campaign during the current financial year. The effectiveness of this will be evaluated in September 1994. Decisions on the future direction of the hydatid disease campaign in Wales will be taken in light of the outcome of this evaluation.

Additionally, the communicable disease surveillance centre, Wales, is currently preparing a survey into the incidence of hydatid disease in humans in Wales for the period 1984 to 1992. We hope to have the results of this shortly.

Job Vacancies

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the number of vacancies within each jobcentre area in Wales in each of the last four quarters.

Mr. David Hunt: All available vacancy figures can be accessed on-line by staff in the Library of the House.

European Farm Commissioners

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 7 May, *Official Report*, column *275*, who represented his Department at the meeting of European Farm Commissioners on 26 and 27 April.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department was represented at the Agriculture Council of Ministers on 26 and 27 April by the head of the agricultural commodities, structures and general policy division.

Council Mortgages

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance has been given to local authorities as regards the gross rate of interest to be paid for by council mortgages.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Under the provisions of section 438 and schedule 16 of the Housing Act 1985, local authorities are obliged to set their mortgage interest rate at the higher of the "standard national rate" or the "local average rate".

A revised standard national rate of 8·01 per cent. was declared, and notified to authorities, on 26 February and came into effect on 1 March. On 2 March, the Local Authority Mortgage Interest Rate Determination 1993 was issued to authorities setting out a revised method of calculating the local average rate.

Employees' Qualifications

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of *(a)* employees and *(b)* the self-employed in Wales had (i) a higher education degree or equivalent, (ii) higher education experience below degree level, (iii) GCE A-level or the equivalent, (iv) O-level or the equivalent, (v) other forms of qualification and (vi) no qualifications in each year since 1984.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information requested is available from the labour force survey and is included in the table.

Per cent.

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
(a) Employees									
Degree of equivalent	7	7	9	7	7	7	8	8	10
Other higher education	9	9	9	8	8	8	9	8	9
A-level or equivalent	22	22	21	23	23	22	24	26	27
O-level or equivalent	17	18	19	19	19	20	21	21	22
Other qualifications	7	8	8	9	12	13	10	9	10
No qualifications	39	36	34	34	31	30	28	28	22
(b) Self employed[1]									
Higher education qualification[2]	10	10	14	12	13	13	14	12	14
GCE A-level or equivalent	31	35	34	30	31	32	38	37	39
Other qualification[3]	18	21	15	21	22	22	22	20	18
No qualifications	41	34	36	37	34	33	27	30	29

[1] For the self-employed some Labour Force Survey estimates for Wales are not accurate enough to be published in the level of detail required. Some groups of qualifications have, therefore, been aggregated for the answer.
[2] Includes Degree and all other Higher Education Qualifications.
[3] Includes O-level and all other qualifications.

Historic Buildings Council

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the 36th annual report of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The 36th annual report of the Historic Buildings Council for Wales has been published today. The report covers the financial year 1991-92 and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people aged *(a)* 16 to 17 years, *(b)* 18 to 19 years and *(c)* 20 to 24 years were unemployed in each travel-to-work area in Wales in each of the last four quarters;

(2) what were the numbers and percentages of long-term unemployed people aged *(a)* 18 to 24 years, *(b)* 25 to 59 years and *(c)* 60 years or over within each travel-to-work area in Wales in each of the last four quarters;

(3) if he will publish figures showing the number of unemployed people by duration of unemployment within each county in Wales indicating the number who have been unemployed for *(a)* zero to three months, *(b)* three to six months, *(c)* six to 12 months and *(d)* 12 months or more.

Mr. David Hunt: All available unemployment claimant figures can be assessed on-line by the staff of the Library of the House.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female workers in Wales were in (i) full-time and (ii) part-time employment in each county in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures are available only for years when a census of employment was carried out and the results prior to 1981 are not comparable with later years. All available employment figures can be accessed on-line by staff in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his answer of 17 May *Official Report*, columns *57-58*, how many people, and what percentage of all adults aged 16 years or over, were recorded by the 1991 census in Wales as economically inactive.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of adults in Wales aged 16 or over recorded as economically inactive by the 1991 census was 1,002,205. This represents 44·4 per cent. of the total resident population aged 16 or over.

HEALTH

Patient Records

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to whom *(a)* written and *(b)* computer notes on patients held by general practitioners belong.

Mr. Sackville: Ownership of records on patients maintained by general practitioners in accordance with their terms of service, is vested in family health services authorities.

Spastics Society

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she last met representatives from the Spastics Society to discuss *(a)* the adoption of a disability income scheme and *(b)* reform of the tort system in dealing with claims of negligence against the medical profession.

Mr. Yeo: We have had no such meetings.

Drugs and Alcohol

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish details of all the monitoring information held by her Department on the funding of drug and alcohol services after 1 April.

Mr. Yeo: We expect to publish the findings of the monitoring exercise now being undertaken by Goldsmiths' college, including aggregated national data, when the exercise is completed at the end of July.

Limited List

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs to finish its deliberations on which products in each of the 10 new categories are to be placed on the selected list; and if she intends to publish their advice.

Dr. Mawhinney: The committee has been asked to complete its work by the end of the year. The committee's advice is confidential and will not be published.

Teenagers (Magazine Advice)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to encourage magazines for teenage girls to include moral as well as practical advice on sexual issues.

Mr. Sackville: It is important that discussion about sexual health matters has proper regard to moral considerations, the value of family life and the responsibilities of parenthood, and this is the approach set out in the Government's White Paper "The Health of the Nation". We hope that those responsible within the media for decisions about the content of magazines read by young people will bear this firmly in mind.

Doctors and Consultants (Suspensions)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing *(a)* how many doctors are currently suspended, *(b)* the breakdown of *(a)* in terms of gender and race and *(c)* the breakdown of *(a)* in terms of general practitioners and hospital doctors: and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally.

Schools Health Service

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what directives she has given to district health authorities on the schools health service; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what steps she is taking to protect the schools health service, and to ensure a uniform standard of service throughout the country; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Health authorities are aware that, in their purchasing of health services for their local populations they must fulfil the duty under section 5 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to provide for the inspection and treatment of children at maintained schools—duties which may be extended to independent schools by arrangement with the school's proprietors. How they do so is a matter

for local decision. With the increasing involvement of general practitioners and their primary care teams in child health surveillance, many school children receive the bulk of the health care they require from GPs as part of a comprehensive family practitioner service. It is therefore no longer appropriate to insist on a separate school health service responsible for all school children. We foresee a continuing need for some specialised services, particularly for children with special educational needs and for those not adequately covered by primary care. We intend to publish guidance on such provision within a good practice guide to child community health services.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the funding allocation for the schools health service for each year since 1985.

Mr. Yeo: Funding is provided through the general allocation for community health services. It is not possible to identify specific allocations to health services for school children.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* school nurses and *(b)* school medical officers were employed by each district health authority in each year since 1985.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Blood Donors

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what categories of person are prevented from donating blood for the national blood transfusion service.

Mr. Sackville: People wishing to donate blood but who consider themselves to be in the following categories are asked not to give blood:

- anyone who has AIDS, is HIV positive or thinks they may need an AIDS test
- anyone who has ever injected themselves with drugs
- any man who has ever had sex with another man
- anyone who has ever worked as a prostitute
- any man who has had sex with a woman he knows has AIDS or is HIV positive
- any woman who has had sex with a man she knows has ever had sex with another man
- anyone who has had sex with a man or woman who they know has ever injected themselves with drugs
- any woman who has had sex with a man who she knows has haemophilia.

People who consider themselves to be in the following categories are asked not to give blood if in the last two years they have had sex with:

- a male or female prostitute
- any man or woman of any race living in Africa—but not Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya or Egypt—or any man or woman who has had sex in the last two years with anyone living there.

Others may be deferred from giving blood, either permanently or for a period if

- they have had an infectious disease in the last two years, or if they have been in contact with an infectious disease in the last six months
- they have visited or lived abroad other than in Europe
- they have received any innoculations or vaccinations in the last six months or ever been treated with human growth hormone
- they have had any of the following: anaemia; asthma; brucellosis (undulant fever); cancer; diabetes; epilepsy (fits); glandular fever; hay fever; heart disease; high blood pressure; hospital admission; jaundice (including contact with a case during the past six months); kidney disease; malaria; stroke; tuberculosis.

TRANSPORT

Nuclear Fuel (Transport)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he takes to monitor the compliance with weight regulations of wagons used for the shipments of spent nuclear fuel sent to Sellafield from Germany; and which shipments he has checked for their compliance.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to her rail freight questions on 12 May, *Official Report*, column *462*.

Scirocco

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken following the refusal of the Spanish authorities to permit, and the use of gunboats to prevent, the landing at Almeria of the British-registered vessel Scirocco.

Mr. Norris: We are continuing our efforts to resolve the matter. In our view, Cenargo is entitled to operate this service under European Community legislation on shipping liberalisation. We welcome the fact that the Spanish Government have conceded that there is no legal obstacle to Cenargo operating such a service.

Marine Emergencies Organisation

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to the future of the Marine Emergencies Organisation.

Mr. MacGregor: I have decided that the Marine Emergencies Organisation should be a candidate for executive agency status within my Department. I am confident that this will provide the MEO with the incentive and opportunity to enhance the well-regarded service it already provides. The necessary preparatory work is being put in hand for the organisation to become an agency on 1 April 1994.

East London Rail Study

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 July 1992, *Official Report*, columns *861-63*, what further work has been undertaken on the options identified in the east London rail study phase 2.

Mr. Norris: I understand that work has focused on a Thames crossing between the royal docks and Woolwich and that a joint London Transport—London Docklands development corporation study has been looking at the local and more strategic impact of such a link. Improved access to London City airport by the docklands light railway and improved local links between the royal docks and Barking remain possibilities and will be the subject of further studies.

EDUCATION

Oxbridge College Fees

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what formulae are used for calculating the grants for college fees at Oxford and Cambridge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 22 April, *Official Report* column *154*. The changes in college fees at Oxford and Cambridge each year take account of the change in the average unit of public funding for student places in higher education. Discussions between the Department and representatives of the colleges on fee levels for the 1993-94 academic year are currently in progress.

"Testing: The Facts"

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost to public funds of the promotional package "Testing: The Facts"; and how widely it was distributed.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) on Wednesday 19 May 1993 *Official Report* columns *170-71*.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Alan Clark

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister if Mr. Alan Clark was telephone tapped during his period in office as a Minister of the Crown.

The Prime Minister: The policy on the interception of the telephones of Members of Parliament remains as stated in 1966 by the then Prime Minister, the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, and as applied by successive Governments since. In answer to questions on 17 November 1966, Lord Wilson said that he had given instructions that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of Parliament and that, if there were a development which required such a change of policy, he would at such moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative make a statement in the House about it. As I said in reply to a similar question by the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 29 June 1992 at column *375*, the Government regard this undertaking as still applying to both postal and telephone interception.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Currency and Commodity Dealings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for requiring a full audit trail in currency and commodity dealings as a protection against fraud and price manipulation.

Mr. Nelson: Institutions regulated by the Bank and under the Financial Services Act must have adequate systems to control the regulated aspects of their business, including an adequate audit trail. Where these controls are inadequate, the regulators will take appropriate action. They will also investigate any evidence of fraud or malpractice. I have no proposals to change the present regulatory arrangements, but will keep the matter under review.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for requiring the total separation of dealing and fund management in currency and commodity markets.

Mr. Nelson: Separation in the functions of dealer and fund manager is not a regulatory requirement in these or other financial markets. The necessary safeguards to ensure that banks and financial institutions deal fairly for clients are matters for the Bank of England and the financial services regulators. Their judgment is that this can be achieved by having appropriate controls to satisfy regulatory requirements and by imposing a disclosure requirement, where appropriate. I have no proposals to change the present regulatory arrangements, but will keep the matter under review.

Trade Bank

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what requests the Bank of England has received from Mr. Sadiq Hassan Taha in regard to the establishment of a trade bank in London, since 1985.

Mr. Nelson: The Bank of England has sole responsibility for authorisation under the Banking Act 1987, and it is for the Bank to determine what information relating to possible applications for authorisation may be disclosed. Its ability to disclose any such information is constrained by the confidentiality provisions of the Act.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1970 and for each month since August 1992 the sterling effective exchange rate, as shown in table F1 of the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and currently, distinguishing the effective exchange rate for Organisation of European Economic Co-operation countries and the corresponding rate for non-OEEC countries together with the imports and exports of manufactures in each case as a percentage of money gross domestic product.

Mr. Nelson: The sterling effective exchange rate index which formerly appeared in table F1 of the Central Statistical Office's "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" can still be found in up-to-date form in table 13.1 of "Financial Statistics", copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library. Indices of the effective exchange rate for sterling relative to specific groups of countries are not available.

Information on trade in manufactures with individual countries and major groupings of countries is published in the CSO's business monitor MA20, available in the Library, and information on the gross domestic product is on the CSO database which can be accessed by the Library.

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect of the increase in the terms of trade for manufactures since the second half of 1973 on the balance of payments for (i) semi-manufactures and (ii) finished manufactures in terms of 1992 prices and as a percentage of money gross domestic product; and if he will publish a table showing the relevant figures for each year since 1970 and, where relevant, in index form as a percentage of the second half of 1973.

Mr. Nelson: The terms of trade are only one of several influences on the balance and there is no simple and direct relationship between them. The latest information on the balance of trade in manufactures between 1970 and 1992 at current and constant prices, and on the gross domestic product, is available from the Central Statistical Office database which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he expects the figures for import and export prices of manufactures on trade with other EC countries to follow the same path *(a)* this year to date and *(b)* for the rest of the year as on trade with non-EC countries; what is his estimate of the effect that has had on the balance of payments this year to date; and what is his forecast for the rest of 1993.

Mr. Nelson: While there has been a correlation between movements in EC and non-EC trade prices over the past, prices for our non-EC trade are not necessarily an exact guide to prices for our trade with other EC countries. Figures for prices of our trade with other EC countries will be available in mid-June. The latest forecast of the balance of payments was published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Rents

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage rents to consumers have increased since January 1987, measured by the retail prices index; and if he will publish a table *(a)* giving separate figures for the increase in public and private rents and their corresponding weights in the index in 1978, 1979, 1987 and to date and *(b)* showing the effect of rent increases on the real disposable incomes of council tenants not in receipt of housing subsidies or national assistance.

Mr. Nelson: Between January 1987 and March 1993, the latest date for which information is available, the "rents" section of the retail prices index rose by 70·9 per cent. Information on public and private sector rents is not available in the form requested.

In 1987, local authority tenants not in receipt of rent rebates, supplementary benefit, rates rebate and housing benefit supplement, had an average disposable income of £180 per week. In 1991, local authority tenants not in receipt of rent rebates, income support and rates rebate, had an average disposable income of £218 per week. The information was obtained from the 1987 and 1991 family expenditure surveys. Information on rent excluding rates is not available from the 1987 family expenditure survey.

"Monthly Digest of Statistics"

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the aggregate increase in prices in non-food items since 13 January 1987 for *(a)* the groups in table 18.2 of the April edition of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" and *(b)* table 18.1 for March; what is the reason for the difference between the two figures; what account was taken of foreign holidays in (i) the weights in both tables 18.1 and 18.2 and (ii) the averaging in table 18.2; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The aggregate increase in prices in non-food items within the retail prices index since 13 January 1987 was 39·7 per cent. by 12 January 1993 and 40·8 per cent. by 16 March 1993. The difference between the two figures simply reflects changes in prices between January and March.

Foreign holidays were introduced into the RPI with effect from February 1993, following a recommendation of the RPI Advisory Committee, Cm 2142. Thus, while March 1993 edition of the "Monthly Digest of Statistics" contains indices up to and including January 1993, with no foreign holidays component, the April 1993 edition contains indices up to March 1993, including the new foreign holidays component showing the movement compared to January 1993.

The foreign holidays component in the all-items RPI for 1993 has a weight of 30 parts per 1,000.

Changes in prices for the RPI are measured by comparing them to their levels in the previous January and then weighting them together using the latest weights for the current year to produce an overall average price change for each month. These average price changes are then linked with the figures for earlier years.

By "chain-linking" the calculations in this way, the index can both take account of changes in the make-up of household spending from year to year and provide comparisons between different years. This procedure ensures that if something is dropped from the index or introduced, the index is not distorted. Thus, the introduction of foreign holidays has not resulted in a discontinuity in the level of the index.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any officials of his Department have met third parties to discuss matters relating to the possible privatisation of the Forestry Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: From time to time, my officials meet bodies and organisations with interests in forestry.

Drugs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many registered drug addicts there were in Wales in each year since 1987; and how many *(a)* registered heroin addicts, *(b)* new heroin addicts in each year, *(c)* cocaine addicts and *(d)* new cocaine addicts there were in each year.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is given in the table.

Drug addicts notified in Wales to the Home Office during the year 1987-91

Number of persons

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
All notified addicts	230	253	299	366	528
All heroin addicts	154	186	196	231	208
New heroin addicts	53	66	70	77	106
All cocaine addicts	8	13	20	17	12
New cocaine addicts	2	10	10	8	10

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on *(a)* the real street price after accounting for inflation and *(b)* the purity of hard drugs in the United Kingdom since 1987.

Mr. Jack: As drug dealing is an illegal and clandestine activity, it is not possible to obtain more than a very general indication of the street prices of drugs. Information obtained by the National Criminal Intelligence Service and set out in the table suggests that over the period 1987-92, the street prices of drugs such as heroin, cocaine and amphetamines have remained relatively steady.

Price per gramme

	Heroin	*Cocaine*	*Amphetamine*
1987	£75-90 (£102-122)[1]	£60-90 (£81-122)[1]	£10-20 (£14-27)[1]
1988	£80-100	£60-80	£10-15
1989	£70-90	£60-80	£10-15
1990	£60-90	£50-100	£12-15
1991	£50-100	£50-100	£12-15
1992	£50-100	£50-100	£10-15

[1] Expressed in 1992 prices.

The purity level of drugs as ascertained by scientific analysis will depend on at what point the sample is intercepted in the chain between dealers and misusers. Average street level purities for the period in question are contained in the table.

Percentages

	Heroin	*Cocaine*	*Amphetamine*
1987	33	56	11
1988	36	61	10
1989	39	48	7
1990	38	45	6
1991	48	51	5
1992	42	48	6

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish figures showing the proportion of *(a)* heroin and *(b)* cocaine seized by (1) Customs and Excise and (2) other agencies within (i) the United Kingdom and its waters and (ii) Wales in each year since 1987.

Mr. Jack: The information relating to the proportion of heroin and cocaine seizures by weight in the United Kingdom made by Her Majesty's Customs and other agencies is given in the table. Information regarding amounts seized in Wales is not held separately.

Proportion of the weight of heroin and cocaine seized by Her Majesty's Customs, Police and other agencies, United Kingdom, 1987-91

United Kingdom — *Percentages*

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Heroin					
Her Majesty's Customs	80·7	90·5	94·1	95·6	77·8
Police and other agencies	19·3	9·5	5·9	4·4	22·2
Cocaine					
Her Majesty's Customs	89·1	82·6	85·5	91·9	98·4
Police and other agencies	10·9	17·4	14·5	8·1	1·6

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the total quantity and *(b)* the estimated street value of (i) heroin, (ii) cocaine, (iii) synthetic category A drugs and (iv) all category A drugs seized within (1) the United Kingdom and (2) Wales in each year from 1987.

Mr. Jack: The available information on the quantity of class A drugs seized in the United Kingdom is published in table 2.4 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Statistics of drugs seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom, 1992", a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on estimated street value is not collected centrally, and estimates of the quantity of controlled drugs seized are compiled only for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Child Deaths

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children are recorded as having suffered a violent death during the last five years; and in how many of these cases criminal proceedings were subsequently brought.

Mr. Jack: A total of 474 offences of homicide were initially recorded in England and Wales during the period 1987 to 1991 where the victim was a person under the age of 16 years; in 391 of these, criminal proceedings were brought. In the remaining 83 cases, there was one case where the suspect died, 59 cases where the suspect committed suicide, nine cases where no suspect has yet been found and 14 cases where proceedings were not initiated—for example, on the advice of the Crown prosecution service.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a resolution to the Council of Ministers to extend the European Commission's proposals for a data protection directive to personal data held by the police, immigration and national security services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government do not consider that the protection of data in these areas is a matter on which a Community-level initiative would be desirable.

Ecstasy

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Ecstasy-related deaths occurred in the United Kingdom during 1992.

Mr. Jack: This information is not yet available.

Crimes Against Children

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what medical or psychiatric treatment is available for men convicted of indecent assault on or sexual abuse of children; and what plans he has for improvement in or extension of such treatment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Jean Corston, dated 19 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about medical or psychiatric treatment for men convicted of indecent assault on or sex abuse of children.

The treatment of sex offenders, including those who have committed offences against children, within the Prison Service falls into two broad categories, medical or educational, depending on whether the treatment consists of a form of psychotherapy or is based on a cognitive behaviourial approach.

For the former, in particular, facilities exist at HM Prison Grendon where there is a unit using a psychotherapeutic approach involving multi-disciplinary teams which are directed by a physician; the Wormwood Scrubs annex where therapy is conducted through group and one to one sessions involving psychiatrists, psychologists, probation, education and health care staff; and Glen Parva which provides similar programmes for young offenders.

Therapy or treatment is also provided at many establishments on an individual basis by visiting physicians or psychiatrists according to the clinical needs of the patient.

The second category of treatment is being facilitated by the Prison Service Sex Offender Programme which was introduced during 1992 and has been initially targeted at prisoners who receive sentences of four years or more, although there is scope for offenders who are serving shorter sentences but are deemed to be particularly dangerous to be put forward for the programme.

The programme, which is educational rather than medical in character, is divided into two main sub-programmes; a core programme, which tackles offenders' distorted beliefs about relationships, and an extended programme, for those who represent the greatest risk.

At present there are seven prisons acting as assessment centres, 13 providing core programmes and seven providing extended programmes. In addition, two establishments offer concentrated core programmes for high risk inmates serving less than four years.

For the future we plan to create additional capacity and increase the number of establishments providing the extending programme.

Probation Service (Partnership Plans)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many partnership plans have been formulated by probation services under section 97 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991; and how many include reparation and mediation services among their priorities for the coming three years.

Mr. Jack: Although we are still awaiting replies, the initial responses to the partnership decision document were encouraging, and give us reason to believe that most areas should be in a position to submit their initial plans by the 30 June deadline. This timing was endorsed by the National Partnership Forum and received the full support of the representative from the Association of Chief Officers of Probation, who was of the opinion that such a deadline would be acceptable to probation areas.

Unit Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the unit fine scheme on the number of people received into Prison Department establishments for fine defaults.

Mr. Jack: The data necessary to make such an assessment are not yet available.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration he gave to returning the unit fine system to *(a)* the unit values used in the four pilot projects or *(b)* some other values instead of the values currently in force.

Mr. Jack: Unit values in any unit fine scheme must be such as to allow the courts to impose fines at up to the maximum levels approved by Parliament. The maximum unit values in the four pilot projects reflected the then requirement to be able to achieve a maximum fine of £2,000. The increase in the maximum fine that can be imposed by a magistrates court to £5,000 means that it would not be feasible to change the current maximum unit value of £100 without making a corresponding change to the maximum number of units available to express the seriousness of an offence. Having looked carefully at the scheme, we concluded that changes in this area would not address the anomalous results that have arisen in certain cases. We therefore announced our intention to abolish the scheme.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *685*, if he will place in the Library the information collected by his Department on the operation of the unit fines system.

Mr. Jack: Statistical information about fines imposed since 1 October 1992 is still being collected. It will be published in due course in the usual way.

Police Mergers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received urging the merger of a police force in England and Wales with another since taking office; and how many have been received by his Department in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received any representations urging the merger of a police force in England and Wales since taking office; nor have any such representations been received by this Department in the last three years. Details of correspondence from between three and five years ago could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Correspondence on this subject dating back over five years has been destroyed. It is normal departmental practice not to retain records dating back over five years unless they are considered to be of long-term significance.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement giving all the evidence available to him on which he based his decision to change the current procedure for amalgamation of police forces; and if he will place copies of all supporting papers and correspondence in the Library.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* My right hon. and learned Friend proposes to simplify the statutory procedure relating to the amalgamation of police forces because he thinks that, if any amalgamations under existing leglislation were to be considered, the procedures

would lead to protracted delay and uncertainty for the police forces concerned and would be detrimental to police performance.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter sent to him on 4 March from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, regarding the letter about relatives of Abdullahi Mohammed, of 21 Tarporley Avenue, forwarded to him by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the beginning of February.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 22 April 1993]:* My right hon. and learned Friend wrote to the right hon. Gentleman today.

Fines (Non payment)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were sentenced to prison for failure to pay fines in the six-month periods beginning *(a)* April 1992 and *(b)* October 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Robert Maclennan, dated 20 May 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of fine defaulters committed to custody in the six month periods beginning April 1992 and October 1992.

The latest available data relate to the 6 months from 1 March 1992 to 31 August 1992. During this period 9,329 fine defaulters (8,815 males and 514 females) were received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. More up to date information is available about the population of fine defaulters in Prison Service establishments; this was 533 persons (506 males and 27 females) on 31 March 1993, 256 persons (254 males and 2 females) on 30 September 1992 and 328 persons (308 males and 20 females) on 31 March 1992.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he has taken in response to the request made in the 22nd report of the Select Committee on European Legislation, HC79-xxii, of 10 March, in regard to explanatory memorandum 4140/93 on Euratom safeguards, for a fuller explanation of the background to and reasons for the expected increased costs for the safeguarding of United Kingdom nuclear sites and an assessment of the reaction of nuclear business interests to the proposals for the submission of detailed design information to be sought.

Mr. Eggar: A response to the request of the Select Committee on European Legislation in regard to explanatory memorandum 4140/93 will be made when the final text of the proposed amendment to Commission regulation (Euratom) No. 3227/76 is available.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the future arrangements for the operation of his Department's environmental helpline at Warren Spring Laboratory following the announcement on 11 May of the closure of the laboratories.

Mr. Eggar: There has been no announcement about the future of Warren Spring Laboratory. My Department's environmental helpline service continues to be available to business callers on 0800 585 794.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in what circumstances Glaxo plc will not have to pay the full agreed price to the Exchequer in respect of its acquisition of the site of the Warren Spring Laboratory at Welwyn.

Mr. Leigh: Glaxo Group Research Ltd. acquired the site of the Warren Spring Laboratory at Stevenage—not Welwyn—on 1 April 1992. The purchase price is payable in instalments, but there are no circumstances in which Glaxo will not have to pay the full agreed price.

Export Control Compliance

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many copies of his Department's publication on export control compliance have been published; to whom it has been distributed; and whom his Export Control Organisation consulted prior to preparing the documents.

Mr. Needham: Some 6,000 copies of the code of practice on export control compliance have been distributed to date. They have been sent to companies exporting controlled goods, and to trade associations, chambers of commerce and other trade bodies. The Export Control Organisation consulted a wide range of companies and trade organisations in preparing the code which reflects the best practice found in operation.

Energy Policy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the priorities of his Department in relation to energy policy for the remainder of 1993.

Mr. Eggar: Currently, the priorities for my Department in support of the Government's energy policy are to: decide on the structure and licensing arrangements appropriate to a privatised coal industry with a view to legislation being brought forward as soon as possible; complete the review of our renewable energy strategy; begin work on the Government's review of the future prospects for nuclear power; make awards following the 14th round of offshore licensing; appoint the energy advisory panel in preparation for the first annual energy report to be published next year; achieve agreement on a substantial energy charter treaty among all countries of the OECD, of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and make further progress towards a single energy market in the Community.

Other priorities will no doubt arise as the year progresses.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the change in the manufactured imported content of United Kingdom exports since 1970.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 3 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *142-43*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the increase in imports and exports of finished manufactures in *(a)* 1970-77, *(b)* 1977-79 and *(c)* since 1979.

Mr. Needham: The available information is given in the table.

Percentage changes in United Kingdom trade[1] in finished manufactures[2]

	Exports	*Imports*
1970-77	43·2	126·2
1977-79	−3·1	38·4
1979-92	72·1	150·4

[1] Exports and imports in volume terms.
[2] Finished manufactures are defined as divisions 7 and 8 of the Standard International Trade Classification, less erratics (ships, North sea installations and aircraft)

Source: Monthly review of External Trade Statistics.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade in respect of how many parliamentary questions a substantive answer was not provided by his Department wholly or partly on the ground of disproportionate cost in each of the last 18 months *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a proportion of questions answered.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Year and month	*Number of disproportionate*	*Total number of Answers*	*Percentage of Questions receiving disproportionate cost Answers*
1991			
November	3	396	0·75
December	3	248	1·20
1992			
January	3	308	0·97
February	0	312	0·00
March	2	207	0·96
April	—	—	—
May	1	173	0·57
June	12	422	2·84
July	2	343	0·58
August	—	—	—
September	—	—	—
October	6	218	2·75
November	4	542	0·73
December	5	385	1·29
1993			
January	2	320	0·62
February	4	406	0·98
March	8	451	1·77
April	4	294	1·36
TOTAL	61	5,025	1·21

The table includes those questions answered by the Department of Energy between November 1991 and March 1992.

Energy Advisory Panel

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what criteria he will use in appointing members to the energy advisory panel.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 3.32 of "The Prospects for Coal", Cm 2235.

DEFENCE

Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decommissioning of the Merlin reactor at Aldermaston.

Mr. Aitken: Although the Merlin reactor was situated within the parish of Aldermaston, it was never part of the atomic weapons establishment. The reactor was owned and operated by Associated Electrical Industries, which subsequently became part of GEC. Consequently, its decommissioning is not a matter for my Department.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Aitken: Since the office of the Data Protection Registrar was established, 10 complaints have been received against the Ministry of Defence as follows:

Complaint Type	*Number Received*	*Date Received*
Principle 3	1	3 December 1990
Principle 5	2	9 November 1988
		14 June 1992
Principle 7	5	15 December 1987
		21 March 1988
		21 November 1988
		24 August 1989
		8 August 1990
Principle 8	1	3 November 1989
Section (5) 1	1	2 April 1990

None of these cases required any significant remedial action by this Department.

Bosnia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence British forces serving in Bosnia-Herzegovina have reported of Croat forces wearing nazi uniforms or swastika badges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether British combat aircraft currently enforcing the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina are also engaged in the reconnaissance of possible future ground targets.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received from British forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina on fighting between Croat and Muslim forces since 17 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson) on 30 April, *Official Report*, column *591*.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* RAF and *(b)* foreign aircraft were used (i) to return personnel of the Cheshire Regiment from Bosnia to Germany and (ii) to fly out personnel of the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment; why foreign aircraft were used; at what cost; whether foreign military aircrew were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF Hercules C-130 aircraft and Ilyushin 8, Boeing 737 and Airbus 320 aircraft belonging to Saarland and Berlin Air and contracted by the German Government were used to effect the changeover of our battalion group in Bosnia. No German military aircrew were involved. The German Government last year offered UNPROFOR troop contributors, on a bilateral basis, practical assistance in supporting their contingents in Bosnia. The German offer took the form of services they could provide, rather than direct financial assistance. The savings made from taking up the German Government's offer of assistance is estimated at £179,000.

HMS Avenger

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *573*, what specific effect the fleet's commitments in the Adriatic had on the decision that HMS Avenger should return directly to the United Kingdom from the south Atlantic rather than via the Pacific; and what was the difference between the two plans in the projected dates of her return to port.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In allocating the fuel available to the Fleet in 1993-94, priority has been given to operational tasks, including the commitment in the Adriatic, with the result that plans for some other activities, including HMS Avenger's visit to Chile, have had to be changed. HMS Avenger will arrive back in the United Kingdom 33 days earlier than was originally planned.

No-fly Zone

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement of 1 April, *Official Report*, column 505, if the costs of enforcing the no-fly zone under Security Council resolution 816 will be met by the United Nations or from national defence budgets.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Costs will be met by participating nations. In the case of the United Kingdom, they will be charged to the defence budget.

Fourth Frigate Flotilla

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *573*, what was the budget in 1992-93 for fuel costs for the fourth frigate flotilla; what was spent; what is the budget in 1993-94; how much has been spent to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

£ thousands

	Allocation	*Spend*
1992-93	4,421	3,316
1993-94	2,483	[1]311

[1] Up to 30 April 1993.

The lower spend than allocation in 1992-93 reflects efficiency measures and reassessments of fleet activities. The lower allocation in the current financial year reflects expected continuing improvements in efficiency, the reduction in size of the fourth frigate squadron and different fleet activity priorities from the previous year.

Guns

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the planned peacetime establishment of the five artillery regiments to be equipped with the AS90 self-propelled gun; what is the present establishment of an artillery regiment equipped with 150 mm Abbot or M109 guns; how many of the guns in each battery will be manned in peacetime; when the decision was taken not to man complete batteries in peacetime; when and how it was announced; how the batteries will be brought up to full strength; what are the annual manpower and related savings of partial manning; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to disclose details of unit establishments.

Army Personnel Office

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capital value was ascribed to Kentigern house, Glasgow in arriving at the comparative costs of provision of the new Army personnel office.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government already own Kentigern house, and therefore its capital value was not a factor taken into account in determining the cost of the Army personnel centre. The investment appraisal was carried out in accordance with Her Majesty's Treasury guidelines in these matters and the opportunity cost of utilising space in Kentigern house for the Army personnel centre rather than for other purposes was included. This showed Kentigern house to be the most cost-effective solution.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Protocols (Ratification)

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ratify the 1 and 2 optional protocols to the international

covenant on civil and political rights and the 6 optional protocol to the European convention on human rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no plans to ratify these optional protocols. We believe that the European convention on human rights—ECHR—provides individuals with a stronger means of redress than they would have under the first optional protocol to the international covenant on civil and political rights—ICCPR. With regard to the second optional protocol to the ICCPR and the sixth optional protocol to the ECHR, we believe that the abolition or reintroduction of the death penalty is an issue of conscience which should be decided by a free vote of Parliament.

Royal Family (Visits)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the breakdown by category of expenditure by his Department in the latest available year on overseas visits by the royal family at the request of Government Departments.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The cost to the Department to date of overseas visits undertaken by members of the royal family at the request of Government Departments during the financial year 1992-93 is £453,300, broken down as follows:

	£
The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh	157,100
The Prince and the Princess of Wales	133,200
Other members of the royal family	163,000

Regional Aid

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the maximum ceilings for regional state aid for each of the member states of the EC.

Mr. Needham: I have been asked to reply.

The maximum ceilings for regional state aids for each of the member states are laid down by the European Commission in its communication on the method for the application of article 92(3) (a) and (c) to regional aid—Official Journal C 212 of 12 August 1988. Within each member state, the permitted rate of assistance may vary within this ceiling depending on the kind, intensity or urgency of the regional problems the assistance is designed to combat.

	Percentage
Belgium	25
Denmark	30
France	[1]25
Germany	23
Greece	75
Italy	[1]15
Ireland	75
Luxembourg	25
The Netherlands	20
Portugal	75
Spain	[1]45
United Kingdom	[1]30

[1] Some areas of these countries are designated as article 92(3) (a) EEC areas—where the standard of living is abnormally low or where there is serious underemployment—and, as such, are permitted aid intensity of up to 75 per cent.

EC Legislative Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the Commission's legislative programme for 1993, "COM (93)43 Final" published on 3 February; and what is his policy towards the proposal to change the scope of Euratom safeguards as set out in paragraph 244 of the programme.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

The contents of the Commission's legislative programme have been received and noted. Her Majesty's Government do not respond formally to the Commission's programme. The only reference in the legislative programme to Euratom safeguards is contained in annex III under the section entitled "promoting sustainable, environment-friendly growth", and relates to the amendment of regulation (Euratom) 3227/76 to strengthen international safeguards. Initial proposals for these changes were described in explanatory memorandum 4140/93, a copy which has been placed in the Library of the House.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the aid and assistance schemes made available to the Croat Government since independence.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have provided a total of £60,000 in the form of direct bilateral assistance to the Croatian Government. This was used to assess the damage and make urgent recommendations for remedial repairs to the Peruca dam which was in danger of collapse. The United Nations and the EC have provided various forms of assistance in Croatia but comprehensive figures setting out their expenditure are not readily available.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the new initiative launched by his Department to alleviate physical and psychological hardship among Bosnian women will be extended to all women in Bosnia-Herzegovina irrespective of ethnic origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* A programme of assistance to traumatised women in Bosnia-Herzegovina is being started by the United Kingdom-based non-governmental organisation Marie Stopes International. We are providing financial support for this project together with the European Commission, a number of other EC member states and the United Nations.

The project will be based in four centres in Bosnia from where it will operate outreach health and counselling teams. The locations have been chosen on the basis of security, logistics and need. They will provide assistance to traumatised and abused women irrespective of their ethnic origins.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what effect the application of sanctions on fuel supplies to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is having on the provision of humanitarian aid by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Belgrade to the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 May 1993]* There were initial concerns in UNHCR that the rapid imposition of further sanctions against Serbia would delay the supply of humanitarian relief supplies to Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, the United Nations sanctions committee has taken steps to ensure that all shipments of humanitarian supplies are authorised and proceed without delay.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about the Overseas Development Administration since April 1989; and how many have been accepted.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since April 1989, the Foreign Affairs Committee has published 21 reports, containing recommendations about the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration. The Government's responses have been placed in the Library of the House.

Desertification

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement outlining the policy of the United Kingdom Government on negotiations to agree an international convention to combat desertification.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are participating in the negotiations. Our view is that the convention should provide a framework for effective national programmes of action concentrating on the principal causes of land degradation.

Know-how Funds

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries to which assistance is given through the know-how fund; and if he will state the sums involved in each case.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* The countries receiving assistance through the know-how fund, including those to which specific pledges have been made, are:

Poland
Pledge of £50 million over 5 years, commencing 1989-90 and £15 million for the Agricultural Development Fund;

Hungary
Pledge of £25 million over five years, commencing 1989-90;

Czech Republic, *Slovak Republic*: Pledge of £30 million over 5 years, commencing 1990-91;

Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Slovenia

Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the countries of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia: Pledge of £100 million over five years, commencing 1991-92.

A further £60 million of bilateral aid for Russia was announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in April 1993.

We are also committed to spending £5 million on environmental projects in the region in the period 1992-95.

In 1993-94, we also expect to contribute £48·7 million to the European bank for reconstruction and development and £131 million to the European Community's PHARE and TACIS programmes. Total British assistance to eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in financial year 1993-94 is likely to exceed £232 million.

Population and Development Conference

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many members of the British delegation to the preparatory committee meeting for the International Conference on Population and Development 1994 held in New York on 20 and 21 May had practical experience of family planning and population aid programmes; and what organisations they represented.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* Three members of the British delegation have such practical experience. They represent the Overseas Development Administration, the United Kingdom Family Planning Association and Population Concern, a non-governmental organisation.

SCOTLAND

GP Fund Holders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, column *408*, how much of the total savings of £150,000 was retained by each fund holding practice; and on what these sums were spent.

Mr. Stewart: I have written to the hon. Lady to correct an error in my original answer of 11 May where the figure for the total savings of GP fund holder practices should have read "£190,000" rather than "£150,000".

The savings of individual GP fund-holding practices for 1991-92 are shown in the audited annual accounts of the individual GP fund-holders, which are public documents.

These savings, which are administered by the health board may only be applied in accordance with regulations, and with board agreement for the benefit of the fundholders patients. The specific details of the individual practice expenditure involved is a matter for the relevant health board.

Employment Schemes

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were participating in *(a)* employment training, *(b)* employment action, *(c)* the enterprise allowance scheme and *(d)* youth training in each month since December 1991; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Information on numbers of people participating in employment training, employment action, the enterprise allowance scheme and its successors, and youth training in Scotland in each month since December 1991, based on the latest information available, is set out in the table.

	Youth Training[1]	*Employment Training*[1]	*Enterprise Allowances*	*Employment Action*
1991				
December	36,507	17,763	n/a	263
1992				
January	37,940	17,657	n/a	381
February	38,451	18,317	n/a	841
March	38,099	17,670	n/a	1,214
April	36,522	16,845	4,563	1,535
May	35,461	16,298	4,560	1,789
June	36,478	15,792	4,681	2,086
July	35,922	15,464	4,602	2,337
August	35,547	15,194	4,581	2,562
September	35,679	15,307	4,644	2,741
October	35,578	15,429	4,580	2,939
November	35,460	15,558	4,746	3,283
December	34,915	15,151	4,747	3,440
1993				
January	35,711	14,761	4,406	3,408
February	35,191	14,735	4,606	3,434
March	34,595	14,060	4,223	3,407

[1] Data are subject to increase as late returns are received from training providers.

Renewable Energy

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to lay the Scottish renewable energy obligation order.

Mr. Lang: I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 21 April, *Official Report*, column *113*.

Forestry

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all Forestry Commission land holdings over 1,000 acres, giving their name, county, Ordnance Survey grid reference and size.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 14 May 1993]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *487*, in response to his request for a list of all Forestry Commission land holdings over 1,000 hectares. A further list of Forestry Commission holdings over 1,000 acres could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column 170, if he will make it his policy to refuse any appeal made against a planning decision relating to opencast coal until the new natural planning policy guideline on land for mineral workings is promulgated.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend is bound by statute to receive and determine all appeals, which have been properly and timeously lodged under the appropriate planning statute, having regard to the provisions of the relevant development plan and any other material considerations.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indemnify local authorities against legal costs of defending appeals against planning decisions which are upheld subject to prior discussion between the local authority and the Scottish Office.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has no powers to indemnify local authorities in relation to costs; in planning proceedings, including appeals, parties are expected to meet their own expenses. Where one of the parties applies at the appropriate stage in the proceedings, expenses may be awarded on the ground of unreasonable behaviour by another party which resulted in unnecessary expenses being incurred.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with COSLA on the level of legal costs incurred by local authorities regarding appeals against planning decisions.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with COSLA on this matter.

Hedges (Salt Spray)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what study he has made of the effect of salt spray on roads such as the A68 insidiously killing hedges.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* The roads directorate of the Scottish Office Industry Department has not undertaken any such specific study and is unaware of any evidence of damage to hedges.

ENVIRONMENT

Council Tenants (Property Purchase)

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide figures per council of the range of cash incentives available to council tenants to purchase a property in the private sector.

Mr. Baldry: Section 129 of the Housing Act 1988 empowers local authorities to operate a cash incentive scheme to give grants to their tenants to help them obtain other accommodation by buying or leasing a home. These schemes are a valuable and cost-effective way of securing vacancies for reletting to homeless people.

The table lists schemes approved by the Department to date for 1993-94 and gives the range of grant payable under each scheme.

Local authority cash incentive schemes approved by the Department of the Environment 1993-94

Local authority	*For each household*	
	Minimum grant	*Maximum grant*
Eastern		
Basildon	—	19,000
Colchester	—	20,000
Dacorum	12,000	20,000
Maldon	6,500	20,000
Southend	—	15,000
Uttlesford	9,000	20,000
Watford	—	15,000
London		
Croydon	13,000	22,500
City of London	11,000	20,000
Enfield	18,000	25,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	6,500	20,000
Harrow	12,500	25,000
Havering	13,000	16,000
Hillingdon	13,000	26,500
Kingston upon Thames	13,000	20,000
Redbridge	10,000	22,000
Sutton	—	18,000
Waltham Forest	13,000	20,000
Wandsworth	18,000	22,000
South East		
Ashford	—	15,000
Canterbury	14,880	18,160
Chichester	—	18,000
Dover	12,000	20,722
Eastbourne	—	15,000
Eastleigh	—	15,000
Gillingham	10,000	18,000
Havant	10,000	15,000
New Forest	—	17,000
Portsmouth	2,000	15,000
Reigate and Banstead	—	20,000
Rushmoor	12,500	12,500
Spelthorne	—	24,000
Test Valley	7,500	10,000
East Midlands		
Boston	3,000	8,000
Daventry	5,000	10,000
East Northamptonshire	—	6,000
West Midlands		
Stafford	4,000	10,000
Warwick	—	10,000
Wyre Forest	—	10,000
South West		
Caradon	4,000	10,000
Cheltenham	—	10,000
Exeter	—	10,000
Restormel	—	10,000
Salisbury	—	10,000
Taunton Deane	—	10,000
Woodspring	—	10,000

Waste Water Treatment

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the water companies concerning costs expected to be incurred by water companies in implementing the EC urban waste water treatment directive.

Mr. Maclean: The water companies, through the Water Services Association and individually, have made known their views and are continuing to refine their estimates of costs. The Department aims to meet the obligations of the directive in an economical and efficient manner.

Pollution Inspectorate

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the policy underlying, and the estimated impact of, the restructuring of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, as announced on 29 April.

Mr. Maclean: HMIP has undergone an internal restructuring aimed at consolidating the organisational, management and cultural changes brought about by the implementation of integrated pollution control. It is part of the continuing development of the inspectorate as a performance-driven, customer-aware and value-for-money organisation.

The reorganisation will enable the management and staff of HMIP to focus their efforts better on delivering the inspectorate's key objectives more efficiently and effectively and, thereby, to provide an enhanced service to industry and the public.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department gave the European Commission in its compilation on the annex on the United Kingdom to its report "Com. (93) 28 Final-Volume 12" on implementation of EC directive 85/337/EEC, published on 2 April.

Mr. Baldry: The Government were among those consulted.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what independent measures exist in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other member states of the European Community to review the adequacy and effectiveness of environmental impact statements prepared, pursuant to EC directive 85/337/EEC.

Mr. Baldry: The requirements of EC directive 85/337 have been introduced into member states' law in several different ways. In the United Kingdom, the local planning authority or other competent authority is required to take the environmental information, which includes the environmental statement, into consideration in deciding whether to grant development consent. Planning

authorities have powers to require the applicant to provide further information concerning any of the matters set out in schedule 3 to the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988 or to produce evidence to verify information in the environmental statement.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many British individuals or organisations have complained to the European Commission in regard to alleged breaches of EC directive 85/337/EEC on environmental impact assessments since it came into force; how many have been upheld; and if he will make a statement on the impact of the directive to date.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom is not notified of all complaints to the EC by British individuals and organisations and current figures are not therefore available to the Government. However, I refer the hon. Member to the Commission's report dated 2 April 1993 on the implementation of directive 85/337—COM 93(28)—which has been deposited in the House and which gives numbers of complaints for the period 1988-90. It is not known how many were from British individuals or organisations. To date, no cases have been brought against the British Government in the European Court of Justice concerning the implementation or application of directive 85/337.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on European Commission proposals "COM (92)93 Final" and "COM (93)131 Final" for a convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context.

Mr. Baldry: EC proposals COM (92)93 and COM (93)131 concern a proposal to facilitate simultaneous ratification by the European Community and the individual member states of the convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context which was adopted at Espoo on 25 February 1991. Explanatory memoranda have been submitted to Parliament and have been placed in the Library of the House. The Government welcome the convention which the United Kingdom signed on 26 February 1991 and support the principle of simultaneous ratification.

Grounds Maintenance Contracts

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cases of anti-competitive behaviour by local authorities in awarding grounds maintenance contracts were reported to his Department in 1992; and what action was taken as a result.

Mr. Robin Squire: An analysis of all anti-competitive cases received by the Department in 1992 is to be carried out during the summer. I will write to my hon. Friend before the recess with the results in respect of ground maintenance cases.

During the first four months of 1993, 32 new anti-competitive complaints involving ground maintenance work were received. As at the end of April, four statutory notices have been served; in 17 cases we have decided not to proceed to statutory action; and the remainder are under consideration.

Recycling

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent permissions have been given to local authorities for implementing recycling plans.

Mr. Maclean: A total of 245 recycling plans have now been cleared by the Department as complying with the necessary statutory requirements. Once a local authority has been given the go ahead, it should publicise the plan and make it available to the local community.

I have placed in the Library of the House a list of the local authorities which have had their plans cleared.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local government authorities have implemented policies to achieve the recycling of glass, paper, and metal cans; and what incomes were achieved in the latest year available.

Mr. Maclean: According to the recycling plans submitted by local authorities in England, glass is collected for recycling in 91 per cent. of waste collection authorities, paper is collected in 81 per cent. of authorities and metal cans are collected in 60 per cent. of authorities. Each plan should provide information about the future costs and savings attributable to the proposals in the plan, but the nature of incomes achieved will vary from one authority to another and are not presented on a comparable basis.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the approximate volume of glass, paper and metal cans recycled for future use during the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: In 1992, approximately 459,000 metric tonnes of glass; 3,086,000 metric tonnes of paper; and over 80,000 metric tonnes of metal cans were recycled for future use.

Climate Change Conference

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the matters addressed and agreed at the conference on climate change held in London on 7 May.

Mr. Maclean: The conference's focus was how the United Kingdom should meet its commitment of returning CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was pleased that many participants at the conference welcomed the open consultative process adopted, which encouraged the partnership approach that is the key to developing a cost-effective CO_2 programme, and were keen to consider what they could contribute. In his speech to the conference, he accepted the argument put by many of those who have taken part in the consultations that only Governments could provide the basic legislative and fiscal framework for our programme, within which others could act.

A report of the conference will be published next month and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

Public Conveniences

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has commissioned of the environmental and pollution consequences of a reduction in the number of public conveniences and an increase in the incidence of sleeping rough.

Mr. Baldry: None, although as part of independent research into the effectiveness of the first phase—1990-93—of the Government's £96 million rough sleepers initiative, a count undertaken by voluntary organisations last November found that the number of people sleeping rough in central London had fallen to around 420, down by more than a half from estimates of over 1,000 before the initiative began.

Indo-British Environmental Initiative

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a copy of the Indo-British environmental initiative agreed with the Indian Minister for Environment and Forests on 21 April.

Mr. Maclean: I have arranged for a copy of the text of the Indo-British initiative agreed between my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment, and Mr. Kamal Nath, Indian Minister for Environment and Forests, to be placed in the Library.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions he has had in the European Council of Ministers on the time scale for the phasing out of the production of substances damaging the ozone layer.

Mr. Maclean: I have been pressing the European Commission to submit proposals for an EC regulation on ozone-depleting substances as soon as possible, and for it to contain stricter controls on hydrochlorofluorocarbons and methyl bromide than those in the Copenhagen amendment to the Montreal protocol.

Planning Consents (Revocation)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the details of the instances in 1991 when he used his revocation powers on a planning consent.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) on 17 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *60*.

Water and Sewerage Charges

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what percentage *(a)* the retail prices index and *(b)* water and sewerage charges to consumers have increased since January 1987; to what extent the level of water and sewerage charges are determined by the Government; and if he will publish a table showing the increase in real earnings since April 1987 of those employed in the industry compared with the corresponding increase for full-time adult male manual workers in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Maclean: The percentage increase in the RPI from January 1987 to March 1993 was 39·3 per cent. The percentage increase in average household water and sewerage bills from the 1986-87 charging year to 1992-93 was 85 per cent. Under legislation, increases in water and sewerage charges are limited by the Secretary of State under his decisions in 1989 or under subsequent decisions by the Director General of Water Services. Within these overall limits, water and sewerage companies can apportion tariffs for different services, so long as they do not discriminate between customers or classes of customer. Relevant information on comparative earnings is available from the new earnings survey, copies of which are in the Library.

Unitary Authorities

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the remit of the Local Government Commission for England includes considering proposed unitary authorities based on a combination of parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Robin Squire: No, although the Local Government Commission may recommend unitary authorities of any size within each review area.

Rents

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the average increase in rents for *(a)* council tenants, *(b)* housing association tenants and *(c)* private tenants with regulated tenancies in each of the past three years; and what were the comparable figures in the retail prices index, average earnings and the average value of houses in England.

Mr. Baldry: Information on the percentage changes in average rent levels in the last three years is set out in the table. The table also gives the corresponding changes in the retail prices index, average earnings and average house prices. Figures refer to England unless otherwise stated.

Per cent.

	1990	*1991*	*1992*
Council tenants[1]	+15	+15	+11
Registered rents[2]			
Housing association tenants	+12	+9	+11
Other tenants	+15	+10	+13
RPI[3]	+9	+6	+4
Average earnings[4]	+10	+8	+6
Average house prices	−2	−2	−5

[1] The percentages given are the annual changes in average rents for the financial years 1990-91 to 1992-93.
Figures for average local authority rents are not available for calendar years.
[2] The percentages given are for changes in the levels of those rents registered in the year rather than in average rents for all tenants with registered rents.
[3] United Kingdom figures.
[4] Great Britain figures.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were directly employed by each local authority in England and Wales for each year since 1978.

Mr. Squire: Numbers employed by each local authority in England and Wales from 1979 have been published in the joint staffing watch press releases. These are available in the Library of the House. Information about the numbers employed, by local authority, before 1979 is not available.

Landfill Methane Emissions

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the United Kingdom methane emissions arise from landfill gas; what information he has about future trends of landfill methane emissions; and whether he will issue a plan to return total United Kingdom emissions of methane to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) on 11 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *366*.

Surrey Heath Borough Council

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of council tax in the Surrey Heath borough council; and what is the level of revenue support grant.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average headline band C council tax for two adults in Surrey Heath is £472. The revenue support grant entitlement for Surrey Heath borough council itself in 1993-94 is £767,000.

Community Charge

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much community charge was outstanding to local authorities on 31 March; and if he will give details of the amount outstanding to each local authority.

Mr. Robin Squire *[pursuant to his reply, 4 May 1993, c. 39]:* I estimate that the level of community charge arrears for local authorities in England at 31 March 1993 was £2·4 billion. Authorities have, however, made provision for non-collection of £1·6 billion.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 24 May 1993

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Defender Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals he has for a public defender service.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what information he has on the average duration of court cases involving claims for compensation for medical negligence affecting children born with disabilities, during each year since 1987.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is not available and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps have been undertaken by his Department to date to speed up the process of dealing with claims for compensation for medical negligence in the courts affecting children born with a disability.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Over the last two years a number of jurisdictional, procedural and administrative changes have been introduced with the aim of reducing delay in case progress. These were not designed specifically for medical negligence cases, but such cases will have benefited from new regulations which include the early exchange of more information, including medical reports and other witness' evidence, serving proceedings within four rather than 12 months and allowing courts to deal with the question of liability in advance of the question of quantum.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about his Department since April 1989; and how many have been accepted.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Of those Select Committee reports which have been wholly or significantly addressed to my Department, the 21st report of the Committee of Public Accounts for the Session 1991-92, on expenditure on criminal legal aid, made eight conclusions and recommendations, which were in general accepted. The third report of the Home Affairs Select Committee—HASC—for the Session 1992-93, on domestic violence, made 42 recommendations some of which were wholly or in part directed at the Lord Chancellor's Department. The fifth report of that Committee, "Legal Aid: The Lord Chancellor's Proposals", made 10 recommendations. The Government have not yet responded to either of the HASC reports.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Flood Defence Committees

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what date the current term of office on National Rivers Authority regional flood defence committees expires for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the National Rivers Authority and local authority appointments, respectively;

(2) on what date the current period of service on National Rivers Authority local flood defence committees expires for the appointees of regional committees and local authorities.

Mr. Curry: The appointment to regional flood defence committees of the National Rivers Authority made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are due to expire on 30 June 1994. Information about the end dates of appointments to these committees by other bodies is not held centrally, but, according to the NRA, its appointments are due to end on 31 August 1994 and in a majority of regions those for local authorities are due to end on 31 May 1993.

The end dates for appointment to local flood defence committees vary in different regions and, according to information provided by the NRA, range from 31 May 1993 to 30 June 1994.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what written guidance or instructions he has given to the chairmen of National Rivers Authority regional flood defence committees regarding the experience and interests of the appointments made to local flood defence committees under section 13 of the Water Resources Act 1991; and if he will place a copy in the Library;

(2) what written guidance or instructions he has given to the levy-paying local authorities on the financial, commercial or personal interests of the members whom they appoint to regional flood defence committees of the National Rivers Authority; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Curry: The broad criteria to be taken into account in appointing members to regional or local flood defence committees are set out in sections 10(4) and 13(6) of the Water Resources Act 1991. Schedule 4 to that Act sets out more detailed provisions regarding the membership and proceedings of the committees, including declarations of interests. While the NRA and local councils are encouraged to appoint members representing a broad range of local interests, no supplementary written guidance or instructions have been issued.

Departmental Officials

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many offcials were employed by his Department to administer, inspect, regulate and advise the fishing industry either directly, in agencies or on special contracts *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; how many professional fishermen are in full or part-time employment; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many officials were employed by his Department to administer, inspect, regulate and advise the farming industry either directly, in agencies or on special contracts *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; how many farmers are engaged in full or part-time professional farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Information on the numbers of staff in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, its agencies and the Intervention Board is set out in the "Ministry's Departmental Report on the Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96" which was issued in February, and which is available in the Library of the House. Although it is not possible to isolate the staff resources devoted to the specific activities listed by my hon. Friend, the report does contain detailed information on the functions performed by the Ministry and the resources consumed. Numbers of fishermen are set out on page 38 of the report, and numbers of farmers are set out in the latest version of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom"—also in the Library.

EC Beef (West Africa)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about supplies of EC beef in west Africa.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 19 May, *Official Report*, column *174*.

Seismic Surveys

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the report into the effects of seismic surveys in shallow waters on *(a)* fish in general and *(b)* bass stocks and spawning grounds.

Mr. Curry: A study was made of the movements of bass in shallow waters during and after the seismic survey which was undertaken in Poole bay last year. The preliminary report of this work will be available this summer. The area in question does not include any bass spawning grounds.

Beef Imports

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportions of United Kingdom beef consumption are imported from sources in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Chile and Peru.

Mr. Curry: The proportion of beef consumed in the United Kingdom in 1992 imported as fresh, chilled or frozen beef from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay was 1·3 per cent. No beef was imported from Venezuela, Chile or Peru.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Market Testing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the cost to date and the expected future cost of his Department's market-testing programme; how many staff are engaged full-time in work relating to market testing; which firms of consultants have been used in connection with the market-testing programme; and how they were selected.

Mr. Waldegrave: The cost of market testing in the Office of Public Service and Science and its agencies and Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Central Office of Information from November 1991 to date have been £916,000. The estimated cost for the remainder of the current financial year is £1,102,000. There are eight staff currently engaged full-time on market testing.

The consultants who have been used by OPSS, its Agencies, HMSO or COI in connection with the market testing programme, and the method of their selection, is as follows:

CDL Associates (competitive tender)
Chris Goodall Associates (competitive tender)
DMW (competitive tender)
Ernst & Young (competitive tender)
Ernst & Young (call-off contract)
OSI (competitive tender)
PA Consulting (competitive tender)
Price Waterhouse (competitive tender)
Shreeveport (single tender)
Symonds Facilities Management (competitive tender)
Touche Ross (competitive tender)

ENVIRONMENT

Polar Bears, Chessington

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations were held with his Department about the sale and removal of the polar bears, Bonnie and Clyde, from Chessington world of adventure to a zoo in Zagreb; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: An application to export the two bears to Zagreb zoo was lodged with the Department in January. The rules governing such exports are set out in EC regulation 3626/82 which implements the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora throughout the European Community.

The application was considered very carefully, in conjunction with our scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. It was decided that export should be allowed and the appropriate permit was issued on 28 January.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about compulsory competitive tendering for white collar services.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. and learned Friend's answer on 10 November, *Official Report*, column *743*, and to my answer on 19 April *Official Report*, column *42*.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Howard: My Department was notified in November 1991 that the Data Protection Registrar was investigating a complaint made against the Department in relation to the disclosure of personal data held under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The outcome of the investigation is awaited.

Redundant Refrigerators

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of redundant refrigerators retrieved for the extraction of chlorofluorocarbon gas during the last full year.

Mr. Maclean: The Department does not hold these figures. However, we are keen to promote CFC recovery and encourage local authorities to set up recovery schemes. We gave priority to schemes for CFC recovery when distributing supplementary credit approvals for investment in recycling facilities for 1993-94. Twenty-six schemes have been allocated SCAs for 1993-94.

Nichols Institute Diagnostics

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the prosecution of the Nichols Institute Diagnostics for breach of the Radioactive Substances Act 1960.

Mr. Maclean: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution prosecuted Nichols Institute Diagnostics for breaches of the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 on its premises at Newport, Essex. At the hearing at Saffron Walden magistrates court on 6 April 1993, the company pleaded guilty to four charges of accumulation of radioactive waste without authorisation, holding radioactive material without a certificate of registration and exceeding the limit for holdings in their registration. The company was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay full prosecution costs of £2,726.

Environmental Networks

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department provided to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in the preparation of its recent report on the establishment of environmental networks.

Mr. Maclean: The report on the establishment of environmental networks has been produced as part of an environmental project undertaken by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and supported by the Department's environmental action fund. The NCVO received £44,000 in 1992-93 towards the project and a sum of £52,000 has been offered to it in 1993-94.

Lambeth Services

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has received from the London borough of Lambeth in relation to the five notices serviced on Lambeth on 24 March under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988; and if he will take into account the quality of service currently being given in relation to refuse collection in the London borough of Lambeth.

Mr. Robin Squire: The London borough of Lambeth has made an interim response to the notices served on the authority on 24 March. It has requested an extension of time until 4 June 1993 to make a considered final response, and this has been granted. My right hon. and learned Friend, in deciding whether to take further statutory action, will take into account all the relevant information put before him, including the authority's response.

Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish *(a)* the number of hours worked and *(b)* the total amount of money earned by each chairperson of the non-departmental public bodies appointed by him and his predecessors in each year since 1987.

Mr. Howard: Information about the remuneration of chairmen appointed to non-departmental public bodies for which my Department is responsible is contained in the annual HMSO publication "Public Bodies". Copies for each year since 1987 are available in the Library of the House. Information on the numbers of hours worked in each year since 1987 is not held centrally.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives he has planned to encourage the involvement of children in environmental protection.

Mr. Maclean: On 29 April my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced an initiative to encourage children to protect the environment. The first project will be a summer competition to select participants for a children's summit in Manchester on 18 September. The summit will discuss future projects for the campaign. Every competition entrant will receive an environmental summer activity pack. My Department also supports a number of projects involving children through the environmental action fund.

Negative Equity

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of households where the value of the property is less than the amount of the mortgage.

Sir George Young: Based on changes in house prices measured by the Department's house price index, the number of owner occupiers with mortgages larger than the value of their properties in the first quarter of 1993 is estimated to be about 1 million, the same as in the previous quarter.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to seek a derogation from EC measures implementing the terms of the Montreal agreement banning CFCs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* Under the EC regulation on ozone-depleting substances, CFC production and consumption will be phased out by 1 Janauary 1995, subject to any exemptions for essential uses which may be agreed. My Department issued a consultation paper on possible exemptions in March, and we are now considering carefully the bids we have received.

We have no plans to seek derogations from the regulation. We may have nominations for continued production for essential uses.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish the scheme used in calculating the transitional council tax reduction for 1992-93 for each local authority in England;

(2) if he will publish the amount of other adjustments which formed part of the personal community charge in 1992-93 for each local authority in England;

(3) if he will publish the amount of the collection fund deficit at the most recent available date for each local authority in England.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

County Councils

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, Somerset and each county council where no political party has overall control, *(a)* the population, *(b)* the capital budget for 1993-94 and *(c)* the revenue budget for 1993-94.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The available information is as follows:

Liberal-Democrat controlled county councils

	Total population[1]	Total capital budget 1993-94 £ million	Total revenue budget 1993-94[2] £ million
Isle of Wight	126,593	9·018	78·453
Cornwall	473,171	35·252	290·095
Somerset	469,373	43·900	271·355

County councils with no political party in overall control

	Total population[1]	Total capital budget 1993-94 £ million	Total revenue budget 1993-94[2] £ million
Avon	962,037	39·830	570·767
Bedfordshire	534,276	20·179	352·125
Berkshire	752,471	46·558	465·589
Cambridgeshire	669,898	31·262	389·217
Cheshire	966,590	79·857	587·400
Cumbria	489,673	27·694	310·634
Devon	1,040,021	44·238	594·059
Dorset	663,091	n.a.	353·565
East Sussex	716,077	40·929	416·519
Essex	1,548,329	64·256	925·046
Gloucestershire	538,779	33·880	316·889
Hampshire	1,576,295	110·035	875·267
Hereford and Worcester	686,039	17·151	372·260
Hertfordshire	991,515	39·450	594·557
Kent	1,538,943	121·700	964·833
Leicestershire	890,832	37·525	554·413
Lincolnshire	592,556	47·999	357,829
Norfolk	759,363	41·617	442·260
North Yorkshire	720,626	43·408	396·419
Oxfordshire	579,650	37·310	325·369
Shropshire	412,534	25·905	241·354
Suffolk	661,853	36·850	373·373
Surrey	1,033,611	75·512	535·000
Warwickshire	489,850	23·864	288·312
West Sussex	715,617	47·549	403·100
Wiltshire	577,399	22·813	324·509

Notes:
n.a. = information not yet returned by the authority.
[1] Resident population at 30 June 1991 (provisional estimate, as used in the 1993-94 Settlement).
[2] Net revenue expenditure as returned by authorities on the Budget Requirement (BR) return.

Minerals Planning Guidance

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the consultation draft on the review of MPG 3; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* I intend to publish the consultation draft of the revised MPG 3 as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Special Advisers

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if civil service *(a)* terms and conditions and *(b)* codes of conduct apply to special advisers attached to Ministers in Government.

The Prime Minister: Special advisers have generally the same conditions of service as other civil servants, except that their salaries are negotiated individually in relation to previous earnings and are confidential. Different arrangements apply to severance pay. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 30 points.

Special advisers are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants, with the exception of the rules on the acceptance of outside appointments after resignation or retirement and certain aspects of the rules on political activities.

European Parliament (Elections)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding the de Gucht report on elections to the European Parliament.

The Prime Minister: We are ready to discuss the issue in Council when the presidency decides to table the report. If the council were to reach a consensus, which remains to be seen, it would certainly need to respect different national traditions. We acknowledge the attempt made by the de Gucht report to take these considerations into account.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister if he will sympathetically consider any request to meet representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Studies so far have shown that the incidence of death and malignant disease has been no greater among British nuclear test veterans than among the general population. If, however, the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association has any new evidence to change the position, I should be pleased to examine it and will readily consider any subsequent request for a meeting in that light.

British Coal Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Prime Minister if he wil list the correspondence he has received about the British Coal staff superannuation scheme.

The Prime Minister: I have received a substantial number of representations on a wide range of coal issues.

Crossrail

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list all those organisations and companies, other than the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, from which he has received recent representations concerning the crossrail project.

The Prime Minister: I have received representations in recent weeks from the following organisations and companies:

Aylesbury Vale District Council
Buckinghamshire County Council
Grosvenor Estates
London Chambers Network
London First
MEPC plc
Residents' Association of Mayfair
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and Industry
The Corporation of the City of London

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total cost of Britain's contribution to the peace process in the former Yugoslavia.

The Prime Minister: The costs cannot be precisely calculated but are considerable in the military, political and humanitarian fields. Up to 31 March 1993, the United Kingdom's contribution to UNPROFOR operations in Croatia and Bosnia has amounted to £93,835,679. Further expenditure of £2,576,831 has been incurred as a result of the airlift of humanitarian supplies to Sarajevo. We expect to recover a proportion of these costs from the United Nations in due course.

EC Additionality

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of the European Commission to discuss the application of the additionality principle by *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other member states; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I last discussed additionality with the Commission and other EC Heads of State and Government at the European Council in Edinburgh. We agreed that the basic principles laid down in 1988—concentration, programming, partnership and additionality—should continue to guide the implementation of the structural funds. Financial control more generally will be strengthened and greater emphasis will be given to appraisal, monitoring and evaluation. The current review of the structural funds regulations is examining the Commission's proposal on additionality.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he intends to bring to the Council of Europe Heads of State summit in October with regard to the European Court of Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, at its meeting at Strasbourg on 14 May, instructed that work should proceed urgently on the mandate for a draft protocol amending the European convention on human rights, to be submitted to Heads of State and Government at the Council of Europe summit in October. The United Kingdom will contribute fully to this work.

The purpose of the draft protocol will be to reform the control machinery of the convention, in order to accommodate the growing workload of the European Court and Commission of Human Rights and to ensure that cases are heard in good time. All member states are agreed that such reform is urgently needed.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Human Rights

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the waiting time for cases to be decided in the European Court of Human Rights for cases commencing in the last 10 years; what is the projected waiting time for cases commencing in the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information on the waiting time for cases to be decided by the European Court of Human Rights over the past 10 years is not readily available.

In practice, most cases are dealt with by the Commission of Human Rights. For those cases which reach the court, the waiting time for a decision is now five to six years. It is clear that, unless there are changes to the machinery of the European convention on human rights, the delays will grow as more countries join the Council of Europe and as awareness of the system increases.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has indicated earlier, the United Kingdom will contribute fully to the work now under way to improve the system so that cases are heard in good time.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1963 the United Kingdom has been found in breach of the provisions of the European convention of human rights; and what that number represents as a proportion of *(a)* cases brought against the United Kingdom and *(b)* plaintiff won cases.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases are currently proceeding against Her Majesty's Government through

the European Court of Human Rights; and how much time each has taken so far since commencement of the action.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are at present seven cases before the European Court of Human Rights. These cases were first introduced to the European Commission of Human Rights on 28 September 1988; early 1989; 19 January 1989; 9 October 1989; 8 January 1990; 2 February 1990; and 11 May 1990.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are to hold meetings with the three parties involved in the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Lord Owen and Mr. Stoltenberg, the co-chairmen of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia, hold regular talks with the parties to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They met most recently with the leaders of the Bosnian Government and the Bosnian Croats on 18 May. Military commanders of the three parties meet regularly in the mixed military working group in Sarajevo, under the auspices of the international conference. We have no plans to hold separate meetings with the parties.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what breaches there have been of the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina since the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 816; and if he will list them.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UNPROFOR reports of violations of the no-fly zone give details of 28 breaches or probable breaches between 12 April, when the NATO operation to enforce the no-fly zone began, and 12 May, the end of the period covered by the latest UNPROFOR report.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what importance Her Majesty's Government attach to the current co-operation of the leadership of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in supporting the Vance/Owen peace plan; and what measures have been taken to encourage their further support.

Mr. Douglas-Hogg: While we welcome President Milosevic's announcement of support for the Vance/Owen plan, we have made it clear we now expect him to use all his influence to persuade the Bosnian Serbs to accept it. We have called on him to accept international monitoring of the border between Bosnia and Serbia/Montenegro to establish whether he is carrying out his declared intention to cut off all but essential humanitarian supplies to the Bosnian Serbs. President Milosevic is aware that United Nations Security Council resolution 820 provides for a review of sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro if the Bosnian Serbs accept the peace plan and effectively implement it in good faith.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all confirmed breaches of the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina since its introduction, in circumstances where aircraft are known to have crossed international frontiers; if he will detail the origin and destination of such flights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There have been 545 violations or probable violations of the no-fly zone set up in UN Security Council resolutions 761 and 776 since 13 October 1992. Most of these appear to have taken place entirely within Bosnian airspace, although there have been some instances where aircraft have been observed flying away from or towards an international border. The information available in these cases is generally insufficient to determine whether the aircraft involved actually crossed the border.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when discussions are next scheduled with EC or United Nations Security Council partners to discuss the implementation of a monitoring force along the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A resolution authorising the deployment of United Nations monitors along the border between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina is currently under discussion at the UN in New York.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of the continuation of sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in respect of their co-operation and support for the Vance-Owen peace plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UN sanctions have made a major contribution to the current serious economic situation in Serbia and Montenegro. We consider that the pressure exerted by the international community, including sanctions, was instrumental in the recent decision of the Presidents of Serbia and Montenegro and of the so-called Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to announce support for the Vance-Owen peace plan.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom plans to contribute forces to monitor the border between Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At its meeting on 10 May, the EC Foreign Affairs Council indicated that the European Community and its member states would be willing to contribute to international efforts to monitor Bosnia's border with Serbia and Montenegro. No decision has yet been taken on a United Kingdom contribution.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government last had official contact with the President of Serbia; and what were the circumstances and outcome.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister sent a message to President Milosevic on 17 May. He welcomed President Milosevic's agreement to support the Vance/Owen plan and to close the border of Serbia with Bosnia to all but humanitarian supplies, but made it clear that we would judge the President's policies by deeds rather than words. We support the EC offer to contribute to an international monitoring operation on the Serbia-Bosnia border to ensure that President Milosevic lives up to his commitment.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the introduction of further sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia if there is no change in current political circumstances.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Sanctions were toughened recently with the passage of Security Council resolution 820 on 17 April but we would certainly consider the need for further measures against Serbia and Montenegro if we felt the political situation required them.

Israel

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the British Government have made to encourage Israel to implement its human rights obligations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We regularly raise human rights issues with the Israeli authorities, and have done so within the last month. I set out our considerable concerns on Israel's record in the occupied territories when I addressed the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in February.

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Secretary of State since his decision not to attend the proposed United Nations Security Council meeting on Friday 21 May; and what indications Mr. Christopher has given since them in respect of support for the Vance/Owen peace plan.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had talks with Mr. Christopher on 21 and 22 May on a range of United Nations issues including the former Yugoslavia. On 22 May, the Foreign Ministers of the United States, France, Russia and Spain, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, met in Washington and agreed a joint programme of action, with the objectives of stopping the conflict and of moving forward to a lasting political solution building on the Vance/Owen process and intensified international cooperation.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reasons the United States Secretary of State has given to Her Majesty's Government for his country's decision not to attend a proposed United Nations Security Council meeting to be held on Friday 21 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Russia, which holds the presidency of the Security Council this month, originally proposed a meeting of the council on 21 May with Foreign Ministers present to review follow-up to the United Nations Secretary-General's report "An Agenda for Peace". My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had planned to attend the meeting. In the event, the Russians decided to postpone it.

Personnel

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of his Department's personnel are United Kingdom based; and what information he has on comparable data for the foreign ministries of France and Germany.

Mr. Goodlad: Approximately 61 per cent. of the FCO's diplomatic wing staff and 95 per cent. of the aid wing staff, including the ODA's executive agency, the Natural Resources Institute, fill jobs in the United Kingdom. Approximately 39 per cent of French foreign ministry staff and 47 per cent. of German foreign ministry staff fill jobs in France and Germany respectively. But it is extremely difficult to make valid comparisons between the figures for the FCO and other foreign ministries, because of differences in the functions for which each is responsible; differences in structure; and differences in the division of tasks between home and overseas.

Settlement Visas

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average waiting time for an interview for a settlement visa *(a)* generally and *(b)* from the Indian subcontinent.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On average, the waiting times for settlement visa interviews are:

(a) Generally: this information is not available centrally.

(b) In the Indian Sub-Continent at end of March 1993:

	Months
1. Queue 1: people with claim to right of abode, dependent relatives over 70, special compassionate Cases	3
2. Queue 2: all spouses and all children under 18 years	4½
3. Queue 3: fiance(é)s and others applying for the first time for settlement	6½
4. Queue 4: Reapplicants	9

Diplomatic Estate

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, if he will list those publications, in addition to the *Official Journal* of the European Community, in which invitations are routinely published for construction companies to tender for work on the overseas diplomatic estate.

Mr. Goodlad *[pursuant to his reply, 14 May 1993, c. 624]:* Herewith the corrected version, omitting the first sentence.

Invitations to tender are not routinely published. It is our policy to invite tenders from construction companies short-listed after pre-selection procedures.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *373*, how often, and in what format, the further information about a wider range of projects to which he refers is circulated to the Export Group for the Construction Industry; if that information includes all opportunities for work on the overseas diplomatic estate, or only selected opportunities for such work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad *[pursuant to his reply, 14 May 1993, c. 623]:* Herewith the corrected version, omitting the first sentence.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office sends a list about once a year to the Export Group for the Construction Industries of key details about planned projects likely to be of interest to United Kingdom construction companies and of an estimated value above a stated threshold. For 1983-86 the threshold was £250,000; for 1987-89, £500,000; and since 1990, £1 million. The latest list will be sent within the next few weeks.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Russian Federation

40. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the provision of aid to the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom has consistently supported the process of economic and political reform being undertaken by President Yeltsin and his Government, and endorsed by popular referendum in April. The British contribution for this year and next will be £444 million, plus the bulk of a $1 billion commitment for export credits for the whole of the former Soviet Union.

Poverty Forecasts

41. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what forecasts he has made of the change in the number of people in the world who are living in absolute poverty by the year 2000.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A number of bodies, including the World bank, have made varying forecasts of the numbers in poverty. The reduction of poverty, through sustainable economic and social development, is the central aim of our aid programme.

Nigeria

42. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the aid given to Nigeria.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Nigeria remains a major aid recipient. Gross bilateral aid in 1991-92 totalled £14·46 million. We are currently developing programmes of assistance in areas of health, education, natural resources and good government.

Africa (Aid)

43. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister for Overseas Development next intends to visit Africa to discuss matters relating to aid and development.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development hopes to visit east and southern Africa later in the year. Her detailed programme is not yet available.

United Nations Funds

88. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been granted by the Overseas Development Administration to *(a)* the United Nations Environmental Programme, *(b)* the United Nations Development Programme, *(c)* the United Nations Children's Fund, *(d)* the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, *(e)* the International Fund for Agricultural Development and *(f)* the World Food Programme in each year from 1979.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The table shows United Kingdom Government contributions to those organisations specified.

Multilateral contributions 1979 to 1991-92 (£ thousands)

Organisation	*UN Environment Programme*[1]	*UN Development Programme*	*UN Children's Fund*[2]	*Food and Agriculture Organisation*[3]	*International Fund for Agricultural Development*	*World Food Programme*
Year (Calendar Years)						
1979	599	28,533	7,382	2,482	0	7,017
1980	593	15,000	4,991	3,217	0	2,488
1981	600	17,500	7,356	3,616	881	1,853
1982	600	18,500	5,983	5,592	2,110	3,392
1983	750	18,500	6,069	6,195	3,552	828
1984	750	19,000	6,025	8,153	4,243	1,039
1985	750	21,000	8,400	6,779	5,450	500
1986	1,000	21,000	8,308	7,358	3,509	500

Organisation	UN Environment Programme[1]	UN Development Programme	UN Children's Fund[2]	Food and Agriculture Organisation[3]	International Fund for Agricultural Development	World Food Programme
1987	1,000	23,000	12,000	5,760	3,280	10,392
Year (Financial Years)						
1987-88	1,000	23,250	15,223	2,815	2,861	7,502
1988-89	1,250	25,250	8,000	8,518	2,657	9,823
1989-90	3,000	13,598	8,450	8,611	3,166	8,154
1990-91	3,000	27,017	9,035	10,210	2,875	7,542
1991-92	4,000	28,908	9,047	9,643	2,847	20,264

[1] ODA makes no contribution to UNEP; Funds are disbursed by the Department of Environment but counted in Aid Statistics as Official Development Assistance.
[2] The 1991-92 figure for UNICEF does not include United Kingdom responses to emergency and supplementary appeals. These totalled £4,634 thousand.
[3] The 1991-92 figure for FAO includes a supplementary contribution of £132 thousand.

Developing Countries

104. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been contributed by his Department to *(a)* the common fund and *(b)* the European Community's STABEX, COMPLEX and SYSMIN mechanisms to compensate developing countries for shortfalls in commodity earnings in each of the last three years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The ODA has contributed, via the Department of Trade and Industry, to the common fund for commodities as follows:

	£
1990	[1]896,910
1990	[2]448,455
1991	[2]1,793,830
1992	[3]—

[1] Cash.
[2] Promissory note.
[3] No expenditure.

The United Kingdom's share of the Community's expenditure on STABEX, COMPEX, and SYSMIN was as follows:

	£
STABEX	
1990	25,089,880
1991	55,430,396
1992	46,263,043
COMPEX	
1990	1,322,835
1991	[1]—
1992	[2]—
SYSMIN	
1990	4,406,728
1991	3,071,380
1992	1,340,442

[1] No expenditure.
[2] Figures not yet available.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many tonnes of humanitarian aid were delivered to Bosnia-Herzegovina along the land corridor from Split through Vitez before the recent Croat-Muslim hostilities; and which alternative routes have been used subsequently.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Exact figures for the total tonnage of humanitarian aid sent to Bosnia-Herzegovina subdivided by specific routes are unavailable. It is estimated that some 70,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid have been delivered from Metkovic, which is used as the principal depot for convoys into Bosnia from the south, and which is supplied from Split and Ploce, since November 1992.

Recent hostilities in the Mostar area have resulted in the closure of the main road and caused these convoys to have to follow more circuitous routes which involve using mountain tracks. As a result, it takes convoys longer to reach Vitez and other areas of central Bosnia, thereby reducing the amount of relief supplies they are able to deliver.

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the numbers of *(a)* Serbian and Muslim citizens of Zagreb and *(b)* Muslim and Croat citizens of Belgrade who have been displaced as a result of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Detailed figures of the number of people displaced by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia are not kept by municipality. The latest estimate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is that in Croatia there are some 246,000 displaced people from other parts of Croatia and 238,000 from Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Serbia there are 166,000 who have fled from Croatia and 219,000 from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Macedonia

112. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been given by the Government and the EC to Macedonia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have already provided £1 million of emergency aid, in the form of urgently needed medical supplies, to Macedonia. We have committed a further £1 million for 1993-94. The EC has committed a total of 45 million ecus for the supply of primary materials, including fuel, medical supplies and technical assistance to Macedonia. In addition, the EC has committed 15 million ecus for emergency aid.

Road Construction

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many miles of road he estimates that his Department will fund in third-world countries in the coming year; by whom these roads will be constructed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Overseas Development Administration expects to fund the construction and rehabilitation of 312·7 miles of road in the developing countries in the coming year. This work will be carried out by local labour and/or United Kingdom contractors. A breakdown by country is as follows:

Country	*Miles*	*Contractor*
Belize		
Stann Creek Valley	5	Local and United Kingdom consultant
Montserrat		
Lovers Lane to Cork Hill	1	Direct Labour/United Kingdom consultant
St. Lucia		
West Coast Road	4	Regional and United Kingdom consultant
Turks and Caicos		
Bight-Ramada Road	1·7	Local
Suzi Tum Road	1	Local
Bottle Creek Road	2	Local or United Kingdom
Malawi		
Lilongwe—Salima Road	25	United Kingdom
Kenya		
New bitumen sealed road	28	Local
Uganda		
Resealing (inc 10 miles of reconstruction)	50	Local
Tanzania		
Resealing	30	Local
Bangladesh		
ODA to part fund with World Bank	165	Local and international
	312·7	

Sub-Saharan Africa

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the International Development Association regarding the economic prospects of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in regular touch with the World bank about the economic prospects of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, especially through periodic consultative group meetings for individual countries and through the special programme of assistance for sub-Saharan Africa, a mechanism for co-ordinating bilateral and multilateral assistance to support economic reform in the region.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Objections to Bail

36. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Attorney-General what criteria the Crown Prosecution Service considers when deciding whether to object to bail.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service takes into account the considerations and exceptions to the right to bail set out in the Bail Act 1976 and any other relevant information available to it, including material from the police, the probation service, and other sources.

European Law Specialists

Ms Quin: To ask the Attorney-General how many staff in his Departments specialise in European law.

The Attorney-General: The Government legal service contains a large number of lawyers with expertise in European law. In the legal secretariat to the Law Officers there are five lawyers with specialist skills in this subject.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Official Report (CD-ROM)

Ms Gordon: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *201*, what progress has been made in the consideration of making the *Official Report* available to hon. Members on CD-ROM.

Mr. Waller: A CD-ROM version of the *Official Report* covering the period from 1990 is available for reference in the Members' Library in the Palace and Derby Gate Library. For a trial period, Members who choose not to receive the bound volumes of the *Official Report* may obtain one copy of the CD-ROM covering the period from the start of the current Parliament on application at the Vote Office. This arrangement will be reviewed in due course.

Tools for Self Reliance

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to "Tools for Self Reliance" to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Administration Committee, arrangements have been made for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 28 June to 2 July.

EDUCATION

English Orders

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what period of time passed between his announcement of the revised orders for English and their delivery to all schools in England; and what percentage this is of the consultation period.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend announced proposals for revisions to the English order on 15 April and asked the

National Curriculum Council to carry out the statutory consultation in England and report by 30 September. Dispatch of the proposals to all schools in England was completed by 17 May. The period for consultation extends until 30 July.

Nursing Education

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list, for each Greater London borough, the percentages of children under five years old currently registered in nursery places *(a)* in 1986, *(b)* in 1988, *(c)* in 1990, *(d)* in 1992 and *(e)* at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: Participation rates in each local education authority in Greater London in 1986, 1988, 1990 and 1992 —the latest date for which information is available—are shown in the table.

Because of recent revisions to the population estimates to take account of the provisional results of the 1991 census of population, the participation rates for 1992 are *not* directly comparable at the LEA level with those for earlier years.

Estimated percentages of the local 3 and 4-year-old population attending maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in Greater London (1986 to 1992) Position in January of each year

	Participation rates (percentages) 1986	1988	1990	1992
ILEA[2]	40	38	35	—
Barking	37	31	35	40
Barnet	30	29	29	29
Bexley	12	14	15	19
Brent	34	33	32	35
Bromley	1	2	2	2
Croydon	7	7	7	13
Ealing	35	34	35	43
Enfield	21	21	20	21
Haringey	41	40	38	43
Harrow	16	16	16	17
Havering	4	4	4	4
Hillingdon	44	46	49	48
Hounslow	69	69	66	42
Kingston upon Thames	30	31	31	35
Merton	36	39	40	57
Newham	63	58	54	58
Redbridge	8	10	13	16
Richmond upon Thames	16	17	19	18
Sutton	17	20	31	36
Waltham Forest	38	40	35	40
Greater London	32	31	31	33
Camden	—	—	—	26
Greenwich	—	—	—	47
Hackney	—	—	—	36
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	—	—	42
Islington	—	—	—	38
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	—	29
Lambeth	—	—	—	31
Lewisham	—	—	—	37
Southwark	—	—	—	39
Tower Hamlets	—	—	—	44
Wandsworth	—	—	—	37
Westminster[1]	—	—	—	31

[1] Includes Corporation of London.
[2] Information was not collected prior to 1991 for the individual boroughs which comprised the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools in each London borough currently provide nursery classes; and how many children attend such classes.

Mr. Forth: Information about the number of maintained nursery schools and maintained primary schools with designated nursery classes in each local education authority in Greater London and the numbers of pupils aged under five who attended such classes in January 1992 are shown in the table.

Pupils aged under five in maintained nursery schools and in nursery classes in maintained primary schools in each local education authority in Greater London—January 1992.

	Nursery schools		Nursery classes in primary schools	
	schools	pupils	schools	pupils
Camden	3	191	24	821
Greenwich	6	682	48	2,421
Hackney	2	165	50	2,047
Hammersmith and Fulham	6	574	23	935
Islington	3	268	39	1,529
Kensington and Chelsea	4	263	18	563
Lambeth	5	447	44	1,847
Lewisham	2	231	51	2,338
Southwark	5	484	51	2,223
Tower Hamlets	7	695	53	1,992
Wandsworth	3	209	47	2,002
Westminster[1]	3	165	24	913
Barking	—	—	32	1,750
Barnet	4	512	36	1,839
Bexley	1	180	18	947
Brent	4	239	46	2,151
Bromley	—	—	3	154
Croydon	4	453	11	706
Ealing	6	589	44	2,657
Enfield	—	—	25	1,484
Haringey	3	214	44	2,332
Harrow	—	—	19	958
Havering	—	—	4	247
Hillingdon	1	120	47	3,030
Hounslow	—	—	43	2,469

	Nursery schools		Nursery classes in primary schools	
	schools	pupils	schools	pupils
Kingston upon Thames	2	242	15	931
Merton	—	—	36	2,593
Newham	8	947	45	3,498
Redbridge	—	—	17	987
Richmond upon Thames	1	71	12	635
Sutton	2	240	25	1,444
Waltham Forest	4	321	34	2,181
GREATER LONDON	89	8,502	1,028	52,624

[1] Includes Corporation of London.

Science Tests

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes have been made to the key stage 3 science tests following his consideration of the comments he received from science teachers, inspectors and advisers after the 1992 tests.

Mr. Forth: An independent evaluation of the 1992 science tests for 14-year-olds conducted for the School Examinations and Assessment Council has led to changes which are designed to improve the reliability of the test questions and marking scheme.

GCSE Assessments

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on what date it was decided to delay the introduction of the new assessment arrangements for GCSE; and on what date that decision was communicated to schools in England.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend announced on 30 April that the present grading arrangements for GCSE will be retained for 1994 pending the outcome of the current review of the national curriculum and assessment by Sir Ron Dearing. Detailed information about this decision will be sent to schools by the School Examinations and Assessment Council on 24 May.

Grant-Maintained Schools (Disabled Facilities)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools have facilities for disabled students; and what percentage this is of grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collated centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list all the successful capital grant requests from grant-maintained schools in each of the last three years stating the work to be carried out and its value; and how many of these projects enabled disabled students to have access to these schools.

Mr. Forth: I have placed in the Library copies of papers detailing the allocations of named project capital grant to self-governing—grant-maintained—schools in 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Allocations are made on the basis of specific priorities. Since 1991-92 these priorities have been urgent health and safety work, major repairs, bids under the technology schools initiative, and improvements to the delivery of the national curriculum, especially science and technology. Information on the number of projects which have facilitated disabled students' access to schools is not available.

Age-weighted Pupil Unit

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if he will publish a table indicating the value in cash terms of the age-weighted pupil unit used this year by the local education authorities in *(a)* North Yorkshire, *(b)* Cleveland, *(c)* County Durham, *(d)* Cumbria, *(e)* Lancashire, *(f)* Bradford, *(g)* Leeds, *(h)* Wakefield, *(i)* Doncaster and *(j)* Humberside for children in nursery classes, children in reception classes and children in each year from year 1 through to sixth form;

(2) What is the value in cash terms of the age-weighted pupil unit used this year for children in nursery classes, reception classes and in each year from year 1 to sixth form by his Department for funding each grant-maintained school in North Yorkshire, Cleveland, County Durham, Cumbria, Lancashire, Bradford, Leeds, Wakefield, Doncaster and Humberside; and what are the amounts per child in each of these schools, the amount of transitional funding, special purpose grant, top-up funding and other DFE funding provided this year.

Mr. Forth: Information on age-weighted pupil unit values is contained in part 3 of the budget statement required to be published by each local education authority under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988. These returns from the 10 local education authorities listed are being placed in the Library. Annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools is calculated by reference to the local education authority's local management of schools scheme and so incorporates its age-weighted pupil units. Grant-maintained schools also receive a share of the local education authority's central budgets, calculated as a percentage addition to the local management of schools budget rather than a sum per pupil.

As soon as a school is approved as self governing, transitional grant is available to help in preparing the school to take on its new responsibilities. Secondary schools, and primary schools with 200 or more pupils, are currently eligible to receive £30,000 plus £30 for each pupil, subject to a maximum of £60,000.

A primary school with fewer than 200 pupils is eligible to receive £20,000 plus £30 for each pupil. A range of other special purpose grants are available to self-governing schools. Of these, only the grant for curriculum and staff development is derived from pupil numbers in the school. This grant is paid, for 1993-94, at the rate of £42·50—or the part-year equivalent—per pupil. Self-governing

schools are also eligible for a pupil related capital allocation for 1993-94. A full year's allocation is £11,000 plus £20 per pupil. Schools becoming self-governing through the year will receive a pro rata allocation.

GCSE

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average number of GCSE passes received in (i) grant-maintained schools and (ii) other state schools under the control of local authorities in 1992.

Mr. Forth: The average number of GCSE passes received by 16-year-old pupils in (i) self-governing state —grant-maintained—schools was 7·6 and (ii) other maintained schools excluding special schools under the control of local authorities 7·2 in 1992.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each grant-maintained school in 1933-94 the value of *(a)* the direct annual maintenance grant and *(b)* the central annual maintenance grant; and what is *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)*.

Mr. Forth: The information is given in the table. The cash figures and percentages given could change in many cases as we continue to refine grants in consultation with schools and LEAs.

Self Governing State Schools (Grant Maintained) 1993-94

LEA/School	*(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant* £	*(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant* £	*Percentage (b) to (a)*
Avon			
Beechen Cliff School	1,633,708	28,846	14·6
Oldfield School	1,347,723	197,036	14·6
Barnet			
Hendon School	2,076,628	303,600	14·6
Queen Elizabeth's GM School for Boys	2,293,740	335,342	14·6
Mill Hill County School	2,478,559	362,363	14·6
Bedfordshire			
Queensbury School	1,914,222	279,857	14·6
Thomas Whitehead CE School	263,044	48,137	18·3
Manshead CE Upper School	1,567,093	229,107	14·6
Sharnbrook Upper School	2,626,870	384,045	14·6
Ashcroft High School	1,458,417	196,886	13·5
Crawley Green GM Infant	347,883	63,663	18·3
Icknield High School	2,312,915	312,244	13·5
Lea Manor High School	2,228,982	300,913	13·5
Lincroft Middle School	569,307	76,856	13·5
Wootton Upper School	2,050,579	276,579	13·5
Berkshire			
Southlands School	1,190,501	177,938	14·9
Reading School	1,417,073	207,174	14·6
St. Bartholomew's School	2,988,992	436,987	14·6
Desborough Comprehensive School	2,064,111	301,770	14·6
Denefield School	1,823,244	266,556	14·6
Langley Grammar School, Slough	1,329,283	194,340	14·6
Herchel Grammar School	1,153,912	168,701	14·6
The Downs School	1,147,375	167,745	14·6
Cippeham Middle School	582,820	85,208	14·6
Priory Combined School	703,314	102,824	14·6
Upton Grammar School	1,217,398	177,982	14·6
Holy Family Combined School	401,674	58,724	14·6
Whitelocke Infant and Nursery School	237,967	28,318	11·9
Bexley			
Barnehurst Infants School	326,867	47,788	14·6
Barnehurst Junior School	326,867	47,788	14·6
St. Columba's RC Boys School	1,506,139	141,577	9·4
St. Mary and St. Joseph's School	1,399,209	131,526	9·4
Birmingham			
Baverstock GM School	1,972,510	378,169	19·2
Small Heath School	2,082,539	304,465	14·6
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys	1,444,249	274,968	19·0
Great Barr School	3,597,661	525,974	14·6
Hall Green School	1,337,251	185,878	13·9
King Edward VI Aston School	1,190,318	165,454	13·9
King Edward VI Camp Hill Boys School	1,265,517	175,907	13·9
King Edward VI Camp Hill Girls School	1,221,479	169,786	13·9
King Edward VI Five Ways School	1,274,790	177,196	13·9
King Edward VI Handsworth School	1,589,773	220,978	13·9

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Bolton			
St. James' CE School Bolton	1,338,378	195,669	14·6
Crompton Fold Primary School	525,262	76,793	14·6
Canon Slade School	2,842,246	264,329	9·3
George Tomlinson School	1,343,928	124,985	9·3
Bradford			
Bingley Grammar School	1,776,622	269,471	15·2
Hanson GM School	2,307,474	267,667	11·6
Laisterdyke GM Middle School	556,396	64,542	11·6
Oakbank School	2,152,572	249,698	11·6
Thornton School	1,702,276	197,464	11·6
Brent			
Claremont High School	2,477,568	362,218	14·6
Copland Community School	2,435,721	356,100	14·6
Convent of Jesus and Mary	1,963,354	174,738	8·9
Kingsbury High School	4,454,288	396,432	8·9
Queens Park Community School	1,923,639	171,204	8·9
Bromley			
Bullers Wood School for Girls	2,167,614	321,583	14·8
Coopers School, Chislehurst	2,514,527	331,512	13·2
Langley Park Boys School	2,411,550	333,750	13·8
Hayes School, Bromley	2,540,061	361,038	14·2
Ravens Wood School, Bromley	1,946,503	267,277	13·7
Kelsey Park School	1,761,459	255,938	14·5
Beaverwood School for Girls	2,066,367	211,470	10·2
Crofton Junior School	897,041	133,769	14·9
Newstead Wood School	1,682,522	172,188	10·2
Charles Darwin School	1,468,886	160,109	10·9
Holy Innocents Primary School	327,103	48,779	14·9
St. Olave's and St. Saviour's School	1,467,499	150,183	10·2
St. John Rigby School	1,881,691	192,571	10·2
Buckinghamshire			
Bridgewater Hall School	2,705,857	404,647	15·0
Brindley Hall School	2,067,128	302,212	14·6
Beaconsfield High School	1,500,771	220,140	14·7
Brookmead County Comb Middle School	286,820	48,473	16·9
The Chalfonts School	1,916,265	222,298	11·6
Overstone Combined School	373,788	63,170	16·9
Beechview Middle School	318,827	53,882	16·9
Hamilton Combined School	854,221	144,363	16·9
Lord Grey School	2,095,488	243,077	11·6
The Radcliffe School	3,239,101	375,736	11·6
Wycombe Royal Grammar School	2,364,275	274,256	11·6
Calderdale			
Crossley Heath School	1,286,801	194,668	15·1
North Halifax High School	1,442,530	210,896	14·6
Salterlee Primary School	111,421	18,050	16·2
Trinity CE Senior School	1,395,039	163,220	11·7
Rastrick High School	1,706,376	199,646	11·7
Cambridgeshire			
St. Helen's Primary School Bluntisham	337,012	49,271	14·6
Bassingbourn Village College	775,614	113,394	14·6
Gamlingay Village College	357,351	52,244	14·6
The Queen's School, Wisbech	2,624,482	383,696	14·6
Park Lane Primary School	333,576	48,768	14·6
Sawtry Village College	1,162,813	170,002	14·6
Wheatfields Junior School	432,063	63,167	14·6
Crosshall Infant School	370,906	54,226	14·6
Crosshall Junior School	430,187	62,893	14·6
The King's School, Peterborough	1,574,804	230,235	14·6
Jack Hunt School	2,624,647	383,720	14·6
Ailwyn Community School	1,334,413	101,415	7·6
Deacon's School	1,708,097	129,815	7·6
Longsands Community College	2,606,884	198,123	7·6
Orton Wistow Primary School	325,008	37,051	11·4
Sawston Village College	2,152,635	163,600	7·6
Stanground College	2,547,881	193,639	7·6
Village College, Comberton	1,418,500	107,806	7·6

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Cheshire			
Bankfield High School	1,078,010	157,604	14·6
Kettleshulme CE Primary School	77,328	11,305	14·6
Fallibroome High School	1,691,875	155,652	9·2
Henbury County High School	1,604,140	147,581	9·2
Croydon			
Riddlesdown High School	2,132,523	311,772	14·6
Edenham School	2,298,920	232,191	10·1
Cumbria			
Kirkbie Kendal School	1,917,707	280,366	14·6
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	1,071,135	156,599	14·6
Hayton CE Primary School	113,785	17,068	15·0
St. Aidan's School	1,257,049	183,779	14·6
Trinity School	3,278,641	479,333	14·6
Scotby CE Primary School	230,635	34,595	15·0
The Queen Katharine School, Kendal	2,267,872	331,560	14·6
Appleby Grammar School	980,109	97,031	9·9
Dallam School	1,315,207	130,205	9·9
Harraby School	1,082,102	107,128	9·9
Kirkby Stephen Grammar School	726,096	71,884	9·9
Derbyshire			
Netherthorpe School	1,439,375	210,435	14·6
Ecclesbourne School	2,240,762	405,376	18·1
Borrow Wood Junior School	245,111	38,482	15·7
Belmont Primary School	363,530	57,074	15·7
Chellaston School	1,575,822	230,383	14·6
The Merrill Community School	1,903,930	278,352	14·6
Belper Grant-Maintained School	1,867,712	184,903	9·9
Heanor Gate School	1,660,669	164,406	9·9
John Port School	2,946,249	291,679	9·9
Murray Park Community School	1,734,111	171,677	9·9
Noel Baker School	2,370,859	234,715	9·9
Repton Primary School	222,783	34,977	15·7
Devon			
Colyton Grammar School	1,035,908	163,604	15·8
Torquay Boys Grammer School	1,774,814	259,476	14·6
St. Boniface's College	1,375,223	126,520	9·2
Teign School	1,565,351	144,012	9·2
Dorset			
Bournemouth Grammar School	1,814,054	265,213	14·6
Woodroffe School	1,511,788	228,359	15·1
Budmouth School	1,683,719	250,091	14·9
Avonbourne School	1,633,903	238,875	14·6
Parkstone Grammar School, Poole	1,373,046	200,738	14·6
Bournemouth Girls School	1,651,809	241,493	14·6
Highcliffe Comprehensive School	1,298,547	189,846	14·6
Poole Technical High School	2,092,648	236,469	11·3
St. Walburga's RC Primary School	444,783	71,610	16·1
Dudley			
Old Swinford Hospital	1,160,548	186,080	16·0
Ellowes Hall School	1,465,222	189,014	12·9
Kingswinford GM School	1,310,860	169,101	12·9
Ealing			
Brentside High School	2,199,370	268,323	12·2
Drayton Manor High School	2,450,447	298,955	12·2
Ellen Wilkinson High School	2,000,880	244,107	12·2
Greenford High School	1,969,122	240,233	12·2
Northolt High School	1,957,191	238,777	12·2
Wood End First School	426,674	71,255	16·7
Wood End Middle School	400,710	66,919	16·7
Essex			
Chalvdon School	2,504,853	3366,207	14·6
Westcliffe High School for Boys	1,718,291	251,212	14·6
King John School, Benfleet	2,203,841	322,199	14·6
Beauchamps School, Wickford	1,417,253	207,201	14·6

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Bromfords School, Wickford	1,399,827	204,653	14·6
Elmwood Primary School	551,869	80,683	14·6
Newlands Spring Primary School	379,024	55,413	14·6
Saffron Walden High School	2,505,240	366,263	14·6
The Philip Morant School	1,998,980	292,249	14·6
The Plume School	3,229,705	472,179	14·6
West Hatch High School	1,828,626	267,343	14·6
The Boswells School	2,531,434	241,794	9·6
Chelmsford County High School	1,408,772	134,561	9·6
The Eastwood School	1,587,750	151,657	9·6
Furtherwick Park School	1,706,655	160,014	9·4
Katherine's Primary School	325,027	49,102	15·1
King Edward VI G School, Chelmsford	1,516,827	144,882	9·6
King Harold School	1,495,906	142,884	9·6
North Crescent Primary School	2283,187	42,872	15·1
Rickstones School	1,261,607	120,504	9·6
Thurstable School	1,598,152	152,650	9·6
Torells Comprehensive School	1,229,223	117,411	9·6
Northlands Junior School	350,178	52,902	15·1
Great Totham County Primary School	442,950	66,917	15·1
The Appleton School	2,183,358	207,547	9·5
The Deanes School	1,249,678	119,365	9·6
The Hedley Walter School	1,851,527	176,851	9·6
Castle View School	1,510,261	144,255	9·6
Cornelius Vermuyden School	1,465,034	139,935	9·6
Westcliff High School for Girls	1,800,180	171,946	9·6
The Fitzwimarc School	2,136,399	204,052	9·6
Westborough Primary School	655,917	99,091	15·1
King Edmund School	2,109,182	201,462	9·6
Belfairs Community College	2,437,981	221,856	9·1
Chelmer Valley High School	1,683,897	153,235	9·1
Davenant Foundation School	1,994,618	181,510	9·1
Gable Hall GM Comprehensive	1,896,666	172,597	9·1
Jotmans Hall Primary School	337,768	48,639	14·4
Newport Free Grammar School	1,249,963	113,747	9·1
Northwick Park County Infant School	279,538	40,253	14·4
Northwick Park County Junior School	371,933	53,558	14·4
Rainsford School	1,728,967	157,336	9·1
Rolph CE VA Primary School	202,991	29,231	14·4
Southend Girls High School	1,680,686	152,942	9·1
St. Andrew's CE Primary School	180,756	26,029	14·4
St. Clere's School	1,632,620	148,568	9·1
St. Martin's School	2,058,582	187,331	9·1
Tendring High School	2,474,888	225,215	9·1
The Grays School	1,617,924	147,231	9·1
The Greensward School	1,549,340	140,990	9·1
Thorpe Bay School	1,349,294	122,786	9·1
William De Ferrers School	2,637,311	239,995	9·1
William Edwards School	1,565,866	142,494	9·1

Self Governing State Schools (Grant Maintained) 1993-94

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Gloucestershire			
Ribston Hall High School	825,677	122,664	14·9
Marling School	1,382,098	202,061	14·6
Pate's Grammar School	1,702,766	263,872	15·5
Stroud High School	1,312,990	191,958	14·6
Robinswood Primary School	424,252	62,025	14·6
Tewkesbury School	1,904,191	278,391	14·6
The Crypt School	799,745	116,922	14·6
Balcarras School	1,198,943	175,282	14·6
Chosen Hill School	1,974,371	288,651	14·6
Katharine Lady Berkeley School	1,833,040	267,988	14·6
Churchdown School	1,863,730	272,475	14·6
The Cotswold School	1,020,833	149,245	14·6
Newent Community School	2,010,291	293,902	14·6

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Rednock School	1,943,319	284,111	14·6
Saintbridge School	1,438,979	210,377	14·6
Chipping Camden School	1,434,064	209,658	14·6
St. Gregory RC Primary School	446,791	65,320	14·6
Blue Coat CE Grant-Maintained School	287,450	39,668	13·8
Picklenash County Junior School	288,938	39,873	13·8
Wyedean School	1,126,146	130,633	11·6
Hammersmith			
London Oratory School	3,378,300	668,903	19·8
Hampshire			
Hardley Secondary School	1,397,575	204,324	14·6
Burgate School	1,091,648	159,598	14·6
Arnewood School	2,067,639	302,286	14·6
Ringwood Comprehensive School	1,429,546	208,998	14·6
Crofton School, Fareham	1,846,231	269,917	14·6
The City of Portmouth Boys' School	1,578,029	230,706	14·6
The Priory Primary School	140,013	21,702	15·5
Testwood School	1,595,347	233,238	14·6
Abbotswood Middle School	708,213	109,773	15·5
Front Lawn Middle School	356,069	55,191	15·5
All Hallows RC School	2,017,686	205,804	10·2
Bay House Grant-Maintained School	2,915,958	297,428	10·2
Blackfield Middle School	492,024	76,264	15·5
Bohunt Community School	1,922,482	196,093	10·2
Calmore GM Middle School	451,822	70,032	15·5
St. Joseph's RC Primary School	459,669	71,249	15·5
Havering			
Abbs Cross School	1,533,993	174,875	11·4
Coopers Company and Coborn	2,419,022	275,768	11·4
Frances Bardsley School	2,356,534	268,645	11·4
Hereford and Worcester			
St. Augustine's RC High School	1,435,836	162,249	11·3
St. Bede's School	775,721	87,656	11·3
Hertfordshire			
Rickmansworth School	2,025,340	296,102	14·6
Watford Boys Grammar School	2,174,406	317,896	14·6
Francis Bacon School	995,273	156,924	15·8
Watford Girls' Grammar School	2,147,903	314,021	14·6
Parmiters School	2,026,651	296,294	14·6
St. Mary's R.C. Primary School	256,823	39,294	15·3
Christ Church CE JMI School, Chorley	269,328	41,207	15·3
Parkside First School	301,876	46,187	15·3
Hertingfordbury School	206,111	31,535	15·3
Bishop Stortford's School	1,988,859	290,769	14·6
Ashlyns Grant-Maintained School	1,328,656	140,837	10·5
Bushey Hall School	2,280,801	241,765	10·6
Bushey Meads GM School	1,897,977	201,186	10·6
Dame Alice Owens School	2,316,103	245,507	10·6
Mount Grace School	1,079,233	114,399	10·6
Queens School	2,426,771	257,238	10·6
Hillingdon			
Bishopshalt School	2,045,378	342,554	16·7
Haydon School	2,366,141	326,903	13·8
Queensmead School	1,936,377	277,062	14·3
Vyners School	1,879,630	279,902	14·9
Uxbridge High School	1,475,457	214,957	14·6
Northwood School	1,961,004	297,940	15·2
Hayes Manor School	1,506,331	215,109	14·3
Mellow Lane School	2,072,571	280,787	13·5
Oak Farm Infant School	419,346	81,744	19·5
Oak Farm Junior School	480,056	93,578	19·5
The Douay Martyrs School	2,070,421	280,496	13·5
Abbotsfield School	1,580,321	183,317	11·6
Grange Park Infant School	365,825	60,361	16·5
Grange Park Junior School	395,515	65,260	16·5
Swakeleys School	1,646,393	190,982	11·6
Hounslow			

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Gumley House Convent School[1]	1,957,513	254,477	13·0
Gunnersbury Catholic School[1]	1,920,624	249,681	13·0
Humberside			
Wold Newton Primary School[1]	121,213	19,636	16·2
Kensington			
Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School	1,721,938	406,096	23·6
Kent			
The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington	965,161	127,015	13·2
The Cornwallis School	1,578,594	224,836	14·2
The Maplesden Noakes School	1,356,329	185,732	13·7
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	723,273	99,781	13·8
St. George's CE School, Gravesend	2,031,786	284,822	14·0
Homewood School	2,441,340	324,777	13·3
Thamesview School	1,979,169	271,916	13·7
Dartford Grammar School	1,583,271	220,332	13·9
Southlands Comprehensive School	2,133,561	290,573	13·6
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	1,489,802	206,519	13·9
Aylesford School	1,827,149	247,290	13·5
Wrotham School	888,991	119,683	13·5
Simon Langton Boys' Grammar School	1,233,808	169,121	13·7
Snodland CE Primary School	448,750	74,044	16·5
Oldborough Manor High	1,319,626	199,299	15·1
Senacre High School	1,800,475	248,843	13·8
Cranbrook School	1,482,083	212,028	14·3
Angley School	1,581,444	172,377	10·9
Fulston Manor School	1,550,317	168,985	10·9
Oakwood Park Grammar School	969,009	105,622	10·9
Rainham Park Grammar School	2,054,565	223,948	10·9
Robert Napier School, Gillingham	1,560,014	170,041	10·9
The Minster School	2,629,113	286,573	10·9
The Skinner's School	1,348,336	146,969	10·9
The Canterbury School	1,602,901	174,716	10·9
Borough Green Primary School	359,340	59,291	16·5
Chatham Grammar School	1,084,788	118,242	10·9
Sir Roger Manwood's School	1,347,982	146,930	10·9
The Archbishop School	1,233,571	134,459	10·9
The Malling School	1,150,544	125,409	10·9
Sandown Court School	1,671,987	182,247	10·9
Meopham School	878,560	95,763	10·9
Holy Trinity	294,829	48,647	16·5
The Bradbourne School	951,443	103,707	10·9
Hugh Christie School	1,787,900	194,881	10·9
St. Simon Stock School	1,706,071	185,962	10·9
Mascalls School	2,560,289	279,071	10·9
Roseacre Junior School	385,523	63,611	16·5
St. Gregory's Catholic Comprehensive School	1,686,900	183,872	10·9
St. John Fisher, Chatham	2,159,331	235,367	10·9
Sutton-at-Hone CE Primary School	376,771	62,167	16·5
The Charles Dickens School	1,468,886	160,109	10·9
The Folkestone School for Girls	1,574,065	171,573	10·9
The Wildernesse School	1,305,611	142,312	10·9
Westlands High School	2,566,244	279,721	10·9
Kingston			
Tiffin School	2,065,071	301,911	14·6
Holy Cross Convent School	1,343,148	138,344	10·3
Richard Challoner School	1,406,739	144,894	10·3
Kirklees			
Heckmondwike Grammar School	1,314,731	192,212	14·6
Castle Hall GM School	783,243	114,509	14·6
Lambeth			
La Retraite School	1,458,724	255,277	17·5
St. Bernadette Junior School	355,003	89,816	25·3
Archbishop Tenison's School	1,271,048	222,433	17·5
Bishop Thomas Grant School	2,139,657	374,440	17·5
Dunraven GM School	2,683,506	469,614	17·5
Lancashire			
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	1,585,021	231,728	14·6

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	1,716,904	251,009	14·6
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	1,394,580	203,886	14·6
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	1,944,932	284,347	14·6
Newton Blue Coat CE School	331,062	51,315	15·5
Baines School	1,335,938	195,312	14·6
Archbishop Temple School	1,081,404	111,385	10·3
Leicestershire			
Long Field High School	721,457	109,453	15·2
Abington High School	1,072,465	130,841	12·2
Bushloe High School	1,233,364	150,470	12·2
South Wigston High School	1,277,617	155,869	12·2
Uppingham Community College	1,200,821	146,500	12·2
Lewisham			
Turnham Primary School	728,449	196,681	27·0
Lincolnshire			
Queen Elizabeth's GM Grammar School	781,093	106,496	13·6
Skegness Grammar School	1,314,009	179,364	13·7
The Kings School Grantham	1,687,328	220,612	13·1
Carre's Grammar School	956,128	129,788	13·6
St. George's School	1,982,852	237,768	12·0
King Edward VI Grammar School	1,253,803	179,770	14·3
Caistor School	911,390	128,165	14·1
Bourne Primary School	596,420	90,656	15·2
Gartree School	768,012	110,302	14·4
Magdalen CE/Meth Primary School	300,264	45,640	15·2
Yarborough High School	2,120,366	288,277	13·6
Lincoln Christ's Hospital School	2,386,241	334,515	14·0
Castle Hills School, Gainsborough	1,035,426	101,472	9·8
North Kesteven School	2,402,288	235,424	9·8
North Rauceby Primary School	114,617	17,421	15·2
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Horn	1,216,391	119,206	9·8
Robert Pattinson School	2,218,147	217,378	9·8
William Alvey CE Junior School	587,988	89,374	15·2
Ancaster High School	1,150,423	112,741	9·8
William Farr CE School	1,574,253	154,277	9·8
Ermine School	367,800	55,906	15·2
Gleed Girls School	1,096,394	107,447	9·8
Monks' Dyke High School	1,359,368	133,218	9·8
Lacey Gardens Junior School	509,418	77,432	15·2
Malcolm Sargent County Primary School	639,906	97,266	15·2
Liverpool			
St. Francis Xavier's College	2,183,879	319,281	14·6
Newham			
Stratford School[1]	1,401,962	238,509	17·0
Norfolk			
Wymondham College	2,030,235	296,818	14·6
Gresham County Primary	146,350	21,396	14·6
Heacham Middle School	322,991	47,221	14·6
Redgate Middle School, Hunstanton	256,311	37,472	14·6
Loddon Middle School	320,494	48,840	15·2
Costessey High School, Norwich	1,326,513	193,935	14·6
Cromer High School	1,097,472	160,449	14·6
Dereham Church V.A. First School	194,542	28,442	14·6
Downham Market High School	2,702,641	395,123	14·6
Marshland High School	1,208,288	176,650	14·6
Norwich Road School	447,268	65,390	14·6
Robert Kett Middle School	549,491	80,335	14·6
West Flegg Middle School	555,825	81,261	14·6
Acle High School	1,000,381	146,636	14·7
Sheringham High School	1,088,381	159,120	14·6
South Wooton School	168,449	24,627	14·6
Cliff Park High School	1,384,638	105,233	7·6
Flegg High School	1,096,199	83,311	7·6
Great Yarmouth High School	1,454,991	110,579	7·6
Lynn Grove VC High School	1,496,431	113,729	7·6
St. Clements High School	1,080,193	82,094	7·6
Northamptonshire			

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Southfield School for Girls	1,265,684	185,041	14·6
Kingsley Park Middle School	540,393	79,005	14·6
Kingswood School	1,860,044	271,936	14·6
Moulton Primary School	493,772	72,189	14·6
King John School	423,897	61,973	14·6
Northampton School for Boys	1,690,538	247,155	14·6
Lodge Park School	1,617,189	236,431	14·6
Manor School	1,397,453	117,386	8·4
Montagu School	1,699,066	142,722	8·4
Weavers School	2,316,277	194,567	8·4
Windmill Primary School	546,201	67,183	12·3
Wrenn School	2,046,531	175,013	8·6
Sir Christopher Hatton	1,548,809	130,100	8·4
Danesholme Junior School	457,596	56,284	12·3
Woodnewton Way Junior School	479,142	58,934	12·3
Nottinghamshire			
Ravensdale Middle School	545,541	79,757	14·6
Greenwood Dale School	1,159,012	144,876	12·5
George Spencer School	1,759,986	219,998	12·5
Oxfordshire			
Shenington CE Primary School[1]	107,439	16,223	15·1
Rochdale			
Crossgates Primary School	281,164	41,106	14·6
Smithy Bridge Primary School	455,749	63,805	14·0
St. James CE Primary	275,195	38,527	14·0
Wardle High School	1,892,379	170,314	9·0
Sandwell			
Manor High School	1,540,270	225,186	14·6
Sheffield			
Clifford First School	124,276	18,169	14·6
Shropshire			
Adams' Grammar School	1,009,015	147,517	14·6
Corbet GM School	1,112,407	112,353	10·1
Ercall Wood School[2]	1,180,593	103,892	8·8
Solihull			
Hatchford Primary School	706,907	110,277	15·6
Somerset			
Sexey's School[1]	1,131,247	165,387	14·6
Bruton Primary School[1]	291,981	53,725	18·4
Southwark			
London Nautical School	1,216,956	242,174	19·9
St. Francesca Cabrini RC Primary	624,767	167,438	26·8
Staffordshire			
St. Thomas More School	1,651,234	241,408	14·6
Cannock Chase High School	1,853,274	209,420	11·3
Surrey			
Guildford County Secondary School	1,585,741	221,152	13·9
Collingwood School, Camberley	2,988,420	422,747	14·1
St. John the Baptist School, Woking	1,370,008	187,359	13·7
Glyn School	1,725,814	230,663	13·4
Gordon's School	677,114	97,325	14·4
Beacon School	1,555,783	178,930	11·5
Epsom and Ewell High School	1,759,053	202,308	11·5
Hawkedale First School	152,769	25,313	16·6
Heathside Secondary School	1,081,857	124,424	11·5
Manor First School, Byfleet	214,755	35,584	16·6
Roseberry School, Epsom	1,680,235	193,243	11·5
Stonleigh First School	261,423	43,316	16·6
De Stafford School	1,058,765	121,768	11·5
Send CE First School	201,997	33,469	16·6
Thamesmead School	979,482	112,650	11·5
St. Paul's School	1,320,301	130,710	9·9

LEA/School	(a) Direct Annual Maintenance Grant £	(b) Central Annual Maintenance Grant £	Percentage (b) to (a)
Sutton			
Wilsons School	1,454,272	248,961	17·1
Nonsuch High School for Girls	1,738,088	256,092	14·7
John Fisher School	1,454,435	215,712	14·8
Cheam High School	1,924,582	225,097	11·7
Sutton Grammar School for Boys	1,285,145	150,309	11·7
St. Philomena's School	1,699,377	173,336	10·2
Wallington High School for Boys	1,306,716	133,285	10·2
Wallington High School for Girls	1,511,973	154,221	10·3
Tameside			
Audenshaw High School[1]	1,380,454	201,821	14·6
West Hill School[1]	1,327,644	142,058	10·7
Tower Hamlets			
Raines Foundation School	2,011,147	434,408	21·6
Trafford			
Ashton on Mersey School	1,621,670	167,032	10·3
New Wellington High School	1,653,588	170,320	10·3
Sale Moor School	1,126,561	116,026	10·3
Walsall			
The Streetly School	2,028,385	296,547	14·6
St. Thomas More RC School	2,301,934	336,540	14·6
Shire Oak Community School	1,263,004	155,349	12·3
Waltham Forest			
Highams Park School	2,145,893	315,446	14·7
Wandsworth			
Graveney School	3,882,643	577,628	14·9
Burntwood School	3,034,341	438,934	14·5
Elliott School	3,131,969	338,253	10·8
Salesian College	1,295,195	139,881	10·8
Ethelburga Primary School	363,171	59,923	16·5
Hillbrook Primary School	625,753	103,249	16·5
John Paul II RC School	1,306,129	141,062	10·8
Southfields School	3,160,338	341,316	10·8
Warwickshire			
Newbold Grange High School (alias Avon)[1]	623,679	95,690	15·3
Ash Green School (Exhall)[1]	948,491	141,683	15·0
Hartshill School[1]	1,165,046	167,408	14·4
Queen Elizabeth School, Atherstone[1]	1,391,275	145,094	10·4
Myton School[1]	2,002,429	208,830	10·4
Alcester Grammar School[1]	1,163,674	96,585	—
Rugby High School for Girls[1]	1,129,411	93,741	8·3
Wirral			
Calday Grange Grammar School	2,072,366	186,513	9·0
Wiltshire			
St. Augustine's School	1,016,685	148,638	14·6
Alderic School	417,004	82,984	19·9
Highbury School	995,756	145,578	14·6
Lavington School	912,503	133,407	14·6
Wolverhampton			
Moseley Park	2,168,107	327,384	15·1
Wolverhampton GS	1,170,673	182,018	15·5

[1] Consultation on a proposed final grants for these schools has been completed and a finalised grant notified to the school and LEA.
[2] School became grant maintained after 1 April 1993.

Dyslexia

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of school children removed from school because of behavioural problems in the last three years are dyslexic.

Mr. Forth: This information is not collected centrally.

First Aid

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether he will require basic instruction in first aid to be part of the national curriculum.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no such plans. Section 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988 already requires the curriculum of maintained schools to prepare

pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. As part of that preparation, all pupils are now required to be taught those aspects of safety education contained in several national curriculum core and foundation subjects. In addition, the National Curriculum Council has issued guidance to all maintained schools in England offering advice on how schools might incorporate topics about safety education, including knowledge of basic first aid, into their wider programmes of health education.

Law Students

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations his Department has received in the last 12 months regarding discretionary grants made by local authorities to trainee lawyers.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations he has received over the last six months on the subject of discretionary grants to law students seeking to qualify in one of the two branches of the legal profession; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on this subject. They have been made by the Law Society, the College of Law and the Trainee Solicitors Group, among others. We have also received correspondence and parliamentary questions from several hon. Members on the training of lawyers.

GEST Funding

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list for each of the last three years the local education authorities which have not been able to take up grants for education support and training funding offered to them; for what purposes the unused funding was originally made available; and what it was used for subsequently.

Mr. Forth: The information provided in the table is for 1992-93 and for 1993-94. Information about 1991-92 is not readily available. The tables set out the local education authorities which surrendered some of the allocations made available to them. Each year's programme covers some 30 or more individual grants for different purposes. The sums surrendered ranged across most grants. We do not know what use LEAs will have made of their unused 40 per cent. contribution to GEST allocations. The saving in central Government grant which represents 60 per cent. of GEST allocations has been redeployed to a range of other Department of Education programmes. To provide the full information requested would involve disproportionate cost.

1992-93
Gest allocations not taken up

	£ thousands
Hammersmith	10·0
Southwark	41·3
Brent	64·5
Haringey	146·5
Havering	24·8
Merton	74·3
Newham	34·0
Redbridge	13·9
Dudley	84·5
Solihull	9·6
Wolverhampton	31·1
Liverpool	172·9
St. Helens	64·5
Sefton	62·0
Wirral	228·5
Bury	40·9
Rochdale	55·5
Salford	106·3
Bradford	11·0
Calderdale	52·1
Newcastle upon Tyne	173·1
North Tyneside	53·0
South Tyneside	1·3
Sunderland	106·7
Bedfordshire	6·0
Cheshire	3·8
Cleveland	4·2
Derby	182·3
Essex	346·0
Gloucestershire	74·3
Isle of Wight	14·4
Kent	1·7
Lincolnshire	0·9
Oxfordshire	26·5
Somerset	17·2
Surrey	3·8
West Sussex	68·2
Total	2,411·6
Note: Total programme	377,200·0
Percentage not taken up	0·6

1993-94
Gest allocations not taken up

	£ thousands
Greenwich	129·4
Lambeth	14·1
Barnet	21·7
Manchester	296·6
Kirklees	153·5
Wakefield	206·7
Gateshead	165·4
Newcastle upon Tyne	109·0
North Tyneside	60·8
Sunderland	43·3
Avon	11·3
Cleveland	169·5
Cumbria	57·5
Devon	747·7
Durham	233·3
Gloucestershire	348·6
Humberside	315·9
Norfolk	221·5
Northamptonshire	20·0
Total	3,325·7
Note: Total programme	320,200·0
Percentage not taken up	1·0

Educational Psychology

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the funding allocation for the educational psychology service for each year since 1985.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not held centrally. Each local education authority is responsible for securing educational psychology services in the light of local needs and priorities. Central Government, through

the grants and education support and training programme, provide financial support to authorities to assist them with the costs of the initial training of educational psychologists. Funds to support LEA expenditure of £3·5 million on the training of educational psychologists have been allocated in 1993-94.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he is taking *(a)* to protect the educational psychology service and *(b)* to ensure a common standard service throughout the country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Each local education authority is responsible for securing educational psychology services in its area. The Education Bill contains power to enable authorities to provide support services, such as educational psychology, to all pupils with special educational needs, including those without statements.

Under the Bill, all authorities in England and Wales will be placed under a duty to have regard to the provisions of a code of practice, issued by the Secretary of State, giving them practical guidance in discharging their duty towards children with special educational needs. One of the objectives of the code is to secure greater consistency in local education authority practice, to the benefit of children with SEN and their parents.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many educational psychologists were employed by each local education authority in each year since 1985.

Mr. Forth: Information on the number of educational psychologists employed by individual local education authorities is collected annually by the Department. However, pre-1992 returns were not compiled in a standard format and are not readily available for every year. Figures are shown in the table for 1985 and 1992.

Numbers of full-time equivalent educational psychologists in post by local education authority

LEA	*1985*	*1992*
Inner London	87·7	
City		0·0
Camden		7·8
Greenwich		11·0
Hackney		8·5
Hammersmith and Fulham		8·0
Islington		10·0
Kensington and Chelsea		6·0
Lambeth		7·8
Lewisham		10·0
Southwark		15·0
Tower Hamlets		10·0
Wandsworth		11·0
Westminster		7·0
Barking and Dagenham	7·0	7·5
Barnet	8·5	13·6
Bexley	5·0	6·5
Brent	9·6	11·2
Bromley	8·0	10·0
Croydon	9·0	10·8
Ealing	5·4	9·8
Enfield	9·0	12·5
Haringey	7·0	9·8
Harrow	6·0	6·0
Havering	8·0	8·0
Hillingdon	5·0	8·2
Hounslow	5·9	5·8
Kingston upon Thames	2·0	3·0
Merton	5·0	5·7
Newham	11·0	11·0
Redbridge	6·0	7·4
Richmond upon Thames	4·0	5·5
Sutton	4·0	6·0
Waltham Forest	8·0	7·0
Birmingham	37·2	37·5
Coventry	12·3	14·0
Dudley	7·5	8·5
Sandwell	8·0	14·0
Solihull	7·3	8·0
Walsall	7·0	10·0
Wolverhampton	6·0	10·0
Knowsley	7·0	6·8
Liverpool	15·5	18·0
St. Helens	4·0	6·5
Sefton	9·0	11·0
Wirral	8·0	13·5
Bolton	4·0	7·4
Bury	3·5	4·5
Manchester	14·0	19·3
Oldham	5·0	4·0
Rochdale	9·0	7·5
Salford	6·0	7·0
Stockport	6·7	9·5
Tameside	7·0	11·0
Trafford	3·0	4·0
Wigan	8·0	6·5
Barnsley	4·0	4·5
Doncaster	9·0	9·0
Rotherham	9·0	10·3
Sheffield	13·6	16·2
Bradford	14·0	19·0
Calderdale	2·0	6·8
Kirkless	12·0	15·0
Leeds	13·5	19·0
Wakefield	6·0	12·0
Gateshead	8·0	10·0
Newcastle upon Tyne	12·0	11·0
North Tyneside	8·0	8·0
South Tyneside	6·0	8·0
Sunderland	9·0	10·1
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0
Avon	28·6	28·8
Bedfordshire	12·0	17·0
Berkshire	17·3	17·0
Buckinghamshire	16·0	21·9
Cambridgeshire	12·0	14·0
Cheshire	17·0	25·1
Cleveland	18·0	18·3
Cornwall	8·0	12·0
Cumbria	9·0	18·0
Derbyshire	21·5	33·1
Devon	20·4	22·1
Dorset	14·5	17·5
Durham	17·4	20·4
East Sussex	11·8	19·6
Essex	31·4	42·7
Gloucestershire	11·0	17·0
Hampshire	31·5	44·0
Hereford and Worcester	11·0	16·5
Hertfordshire	21·5	28·4
Humberside	21·0	24·0
Isle of Wight	3·0	3·0
Kent	19·0	30·0
Lancashire	34·0	42·0
Leicestershire	19·0	33·6
Lincolnshire	10·0	13·0
Norfolk	14·0	18·5
North Yorkshire	15·2	20·0
Northamptonshire	15·0	17·5
Northumberland	4·1	9·5
Nottinghamshire	30·0	28·5
Oxfordshire	12·5	14·5
Shropshire	8·0	12·0
Somerset	9·0	11·0
Staffordshire	17·7	29·4
Suffolk	13·0	14·0
Surrey	22·0	28·4
Warwickshire	9·8	12·3

LEA	1985	1992
West Sussex	12·0	17·4
Wiltshire	13·0	14·8
TOTAL: All LEAs	1,173·4	1,501·6

Behavioural Problems (Referrals)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each year since 1985 by local education authority, the number of referrals by teachers of children with behavioural problems.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not centrally available.

TRANSPORT

British Rail Employees (Concessions)

11. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received over the past year concerning the future of concessionary travel facilities for current British Rail employees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have given a clear assurance that travel concessions for employees of BR and their dependants, and for retired staff will be safeguarded in the privatisation of British Rail.

Red Routes

13. **Sir Paul Beresford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what effect the operation of red routes has had on the use of buses in the relevant areas.

Mr. Norris: Since the start of the pilot scheme in 1991, the number of passengers using the 43 route and the new express service introduced last year has increased by about 11,000 a week. This is an increase of about 10 per cent., compared with a small overall decline in bus patronage in London over the same period.

London Transport Staff (Assaults)

14. **Mr. Wicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many physical assaults on London Transport staff took place in each year since 1988.

Mr. Norris: There were 517 assaults on LT staff in 1990-91, 689 in 1991-92, and the provisional total for 1992-93 is 622. Comparable figures for earlier years are not available.

Crossrail

15. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the future of the crossrail project.

Mr. MacGregor: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech to the CBI last Tuesday, we have concluded that crossrail can be carried forward as a joint venture with the private sector and that London Transport's Crossrail Bill should proceed to its Second Reading next month.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those organisations and companies, other than the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, from which he has received recent representations concerning the crossrail project.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend and I have received representations in recent weeks from the following organisations and companies:
Aylesbury Vale District Council
British Airways plc
Buckinghamshire County Council
Department of Trade & Industry
Grosvenor House
Howard de Walden Estates Ltd.
London Borough of Camden
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry
London Regional Passengers' Committee
London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau
Oxford Street Association
Regalian Group of Companies
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Save London's Theatres Campaign
Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners
St Albans Friends of the Earth
Trafalgar House
Wokingham Friends of the Earth

West Coast Main Line

16. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the proposal by the consortium consisting of Trafalgar House, Balfour Beatty and GEC Alsthom, in connection with upgrading of the west coast main line.

Mr. Freeman: The consortium has put forward outline proposals for a joint venture to upgrade the west coast main line and I have responded to them. Further work is in hand to identify a way forward—which must include a competition for the choice of private sector partners.

21. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish details of the locomotive breakdowns, signal failures and other causes of train delays on the west coast main line, from 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held by the Department. These are operational matters for British Rail.

British Rail Journey Times

17. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail on the reduction of journey times on its principal routes.

Mr. Freeman: The timetabling and routing of services is entirely a matter for the management of British Rail and it would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene.

Traffic Congestion, London

18. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to reduce traffic congestion in London.

Mr. Norris: Our aim is a much-improved public transport system, capable of responding efficiently to

changes in demand, and offering a good-quality alternative to the private car. In terms of the road network, we are planning increasing emphasis on road traffic management measures—such as the introduction of red routes—to improve the reliability of journeys—especially for buses—to take traffic off residential roads, and to provide safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Our roads investment programme has the limited objectives of improving orbital movement, dealing with congestion black spots, and improving access to docklands and east London. For the longer term, we are examining the case for and against congestion charging in London.

East Thames Corridor

19. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with which organisations he has discussed transport links in the east Thames corridor.

Mr. MacGregor: The east Thames corridor was one of the topics I discussed at a meeting which I and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment had recently with the chairman and other representatives of the London and South East regional planning conference. Also, my Department participates in the east Thames corridor forum.

Red Star Parcels

20. **Mr. Matthew Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the publication of the memorandum of sale of Red Star Parcels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The British Railways Board is at an advanced stage in preparing the Red Star information memorandum, and will publish it as soon as all relevant documentation has been completed.

Bus Deregulation

22. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the effect on passengers of the introduction of tendering for London's buses.

Mr. Norris: Tendering has introduced an element of competition into the provision of bus services in London. The effect has been to improve service quality and reduce costs, both on tendered routes and on the rest of the network, to the benefit of the bus passenger and the taxpayer alike.

29. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from private companies concerning the proposed deregulation of London Buses.

Mr. Norris: I have received a number of written and oral representations from private companies concerning aspects of our plans to deregulate London bus services.

Local Roads (Speed Limits)

23. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates have been made of the effect of 20 mph zones on the safety of local roads.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Transport Research Laboratory is currently carrying out a study into the effectiveness of 20 mph zones in improving safety on local roads. Early research shows that reductions in speed brought about by the traffic-calming measures have resulted in a 50 per cent. fall in road casualties within these zones. It has also been found that accidents on surrounding roads have not increased. However, it is still very early days and much remains to be learnt about the operation of 20 mph zones.

Rolling Stock (Leasing)

24. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken and will take to promote the development of a rolling stock leasing market.

Mr. Freeman: The measures include approval in the autumn statement for the leasing of £150 million of new rolling stock by British Rail. British Rail is to establish rolling stock companies and transfer its existing stock to them by 1 April 1994. These companies will lease stock to franchisees and BR's operating divisions pending franchising. They will be transferred to the private sector as soon as practicable. The Government are proposing to add a new clause to the Railways Bill specifically enabling the franchising director to exercise his franchising powers to encourage investment. This would, for example, allow the franchising director to undertake to lessors that, if they supplied new trains, he would ensure that those trains were used on two or more successive franchisees, thus giving the lessors comfort that they would not be left with trains which they could not release at the end of the first franchise. Such undertakings should help to encourage private sector investment in rolling stock in the early years of franchising before an active secondhand market for rolling stock develops.

Ashford International Railway Station

25. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to commence on the building of a new Ashford international railway station together with related works.

Mr. Freeman: I visited Ashford on 17 May and announced that British Rail expects to go out to tender in July for the track and platform works for the international station with a view to works starting in October. The Government have allocated £30 million for such works. I also announced that the principal terms have been agreed for a competition for the private sector to build the station, car parks and other development. The details are currently being finalised and within two weeks British Rail will be seeking initial expressions of interest.

British Rail and London Buses (Restructuring)

26. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given since 8 May to revising the Government's proposed restructuring of British Rail and London Buses.

Mr. Freeman: The Government are always ready to reconsider their policies where there is good reason for doing so.

Freight (Rail Promotion)

27. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of measures taken to encourage freight operators to use rail rather than road; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1975, grants have been available under section 8 of the Railways Act 1974 to assist companies to meet the capital cost of projects in cases where the goods would otherwise go by road and where there are readily quantifiable environmental benefits in removing lorry traffic. Some 200 schemes have been assisted at a cost of £78 million in cash terms. This has resulted in 3 million annual lorry journeys removed from the roads.

To further encourage a switch from road to rail, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced three important new measures during the Second Reading of the Railways Bill on 2 February 1993. These are set out in the *Official Report*, columns 164-65. These measures cannot be implemented prior to the passing of the legislation and until Railtrack is operational as a commercial entity.

Both the enhanced freight facilities grants scheme and the proposed track access charges grant will be monitored to ensure that payments continue to represent value for money.

Rail Headquarters

28. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will establish the headquarters of Railtrack, the Rail Franchising Authority and the rail regulator in York.

Mr. Freeman: No. The franchising director and the rail regulator will need to maintain close and constant liaison with each other, the Department of Transport, BR, train operators and others, many of whom are also located in London. Initially, at least, their headquarters will therefore be in London.

While it remains a division of British Rail, the location of Railtrack's headquarters is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Railways

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement setting out his policy on exemptions to be granted from the various requirements of part I of the Railways Bill.

Mr. Freeman: I have today published a statement setting out our policy, and placed a copy in the Library. Copies are available from the Department of Transport, Room S18/22, 2 Marsham street, London SW1P 3EB.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when open access for operators of new services will come into effect, following enactment of the Railways Bill.

Mr. Freeman: It is intended that open access—the opportunity for new operators to run services on the rail network—will start in April 1994, the proposed vesting date for Railtrack. We have already announced that there will be restrictions placed on open access, to the extent necessary to allow the successful transfer of British Rail's passenger services to the private sector. Guidance on the restrictions required for each franchise will be given when invitations to tender are issued. If open access operators apply for train paths in advance of invitations to tender for the franchise concerned, they will be informed then of the terms of competition which will apply.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to decide the full programme for franchising British Rail's passenger services.

Mr. MacGregor: I have today published plans for the restructuring of BR's passenger network into 25 businesses which will be the basis for franchises to be offered to the private sector. Included in this are some parts of the network which will be further reviewed to decide on the grouping of services for franchising: the central region of Regional Railways and InterCity cross country and Regional Railways long-distance inter-urban services. Copies of the full list of service groupings and illustrative maps of them have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further consideration he has given to the Transport Select Committee's first and second reports on the "Future of the Railways"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I responded to the Committee's interim report by letter on 20 January. I responded to the Committee's final report on the future of the railways on Friday 21 May. I very much welcome the Select Committee's conclusion

"that the Government is right to examine ways of involving the private sector in the railways as a means of increasing the total amount of investment".

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to begin discussions with private sector interests about the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is today sending a consultation document to a number of private sector interests. Views are invited on the best way of taking the project forward so as to offer the private sector a proper return on its investment and to secure value for money for the taxpayer. The Department will hold follow-up discussions where appropriate. I am placing a copy of the consultation document in the Library.

Road Bridges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the merits of design and build of road bridges relative to conventionally commissioned structures.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No representations for publicly financed design and build road bridges schemes have been received. There is, however, an ongoing dialogue with the industry.

M1-M62 Link

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if an environmental impact assessment of proposals for an M1-M62 link road will be carried out under EC directive 85/337/EEC.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: If proposals for a M1-M62 link road go ahead, an environmental impact assessment will be carried out under EC directive 85/337/EEC. An environmental statement under this directive would normally be issued at the time of publication of draft orders under the Highways Act.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many M1-M62 questionnaires he has received from local residents and those involved in the link road proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Almost 6,000 completed questionnaires have been received in response to public consultation on the M1-M62 link road proposals.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the grey route proposals for the M1-M62 link road are publicly available; and what assessments have been made of this route.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Details of the grey route were released at the public consultation. It was rejected on the basis of its effect on property in Lower Hopton, higher cost and low value for money.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make publicly available all data associated with traffic studies for the proposed M1-M62 link road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: All reasonable requests for traffic data in connection with the M1-M62 link road proposals will continue to be met.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when traffic surveys carried out to determine the impact of the proposed M1-M62 link road were undertaken.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Traffic surveys for the proposed M1-M62 link road were undertaken between May 1990 and June 1991.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what weighting was placed upon traffic calculations for the M1-M62 link road.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The calculations for the traffic forecasts for the proposed M1-M62 link road are derived from a complex computer model and depend upon a number of predictions. I will write to the hon. Member in relation to these and their weighting.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures are under consideration to encourage and improve road safety for the *(a)* purple and *(b)* yellow route M1-M62 link proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Both the yellow and purple routes would improve road safety in the area as a whole. If one of these is selected as the preferred route and taken forward for further development, measures to encourage and improve road safety would be pursued.

Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the accuracy of the national road traffic forecasts index.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The national road traffic forecasts give forecasts of traffic by type of vehicle on all roads in Great Britain. The current forecasts were issued in 1989, based on 1988, and are provided up to 2025. The table compares the forecasts in terms of all vehicle kilometres with the outturn. The forecasts are given in a range between low and high.

They are long-term forecasts, and are not expected to be completely accurate year on year, or over short periods.

Indices of traffic—1988 = 100

Year	*Forecast of all Traffic*[1]		*Outturn Traffic*[1]
	Low	*High*	
1988	100		100
1989	104	105	108
1990	106	109	110
1991	108	113	110
1992	110	117	108

[1] All motor vehicles except two-wheelers.
The 1992 statistics of outturn are provisional.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if COBA 9 cost benefit analysis systems are to be replaced.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department uses the principles of cost benefit analysis to assess the economic viability of schemes in the national road programme. The COBA program incorporates the principles of cost benefit analysis and is used to assess the majority of schemes. The techniques and parameters within the program are continually under review and occasionally changes have to be made as the results of new research become available. COBA 9, the version currently in use, is a flexible program and generally parameter changes can be made by the user following instructions issued by the Department. However, periodically it is necessary to revise the program itself and a new version, COBA 10, is currently being developed for release later this year.

Robin Hood Line

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *2*, in what financial year he intends to make funding available for the Robin Hood line; under what powers such assistance will be given; and what discussions he has had about extending the line to Retford.

Mr. Freeman: Assistance will be given either in the form of credit approvals under part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 or, subject to appraisal, in the form of grant under section 56 of the Transport Act 1968. Discussions are in progress with Nottinghamshire county council about the nature and timing of this funding, and about the case for further extending passenger services on the Robin Hood line.

Public Transport

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage more people to use public transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to encourage the use of *(a)* bus and *(b)* rail public transport.

Mr. Freeman: The best way of encouraging greater use of public transport is to promote increased choice for passengers and increased competition for the provision of public transport services. The Government's policies of deregulation and privatisation will help to achieve these objectives. We are also continuing to make resources available for high levels of investment by those public transport operators who remain in the public sector; the autumn statement provided for expenditure of some £2 billion a year on public transport over the next three years. We have also made increased resources available this year to enable local authorities to help local bus services through bus priority measures. I look forward to further proposals from local authorities in their transport policy and plans bids later this year. My Department also has a programme of research on city congestion charging, one of whose possible benefits would be to influence people's travel choices and improve the competitive position of public transport.

Road Pricing Schemes

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Oslo to study road pricing schemes.

Mr. MacGregor: I visited Oslo and Gothenburg on 10 and 11 May to see demonstrations and working examples of road charging systems, and to talk to those involved. I was impressed that technology is now available to make electronic systems work successfully. No decisions have been taken about the introduction of charging for roads in the United Kingdom.

I will shortly be issuing a Green Paper on charging for inter-urban roads that will seek views on the issues involved. The paper and the research will reflect the experience of other countries.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications of the decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development for United Kingdom transport policy.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for supporting the commitment to achieve a reduction in motor vehicle carbon dioxide emission levels to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

Mr. MacGregor: Transport must play its part in the national sustainable development plan and in the programme to limit carbon dioxide emissions. The Government are particularly keen to encourage more economical use of fuel by road transport. We have already taken steps to do this. In the Budget speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a 10 per cent. increase in road fuel duties. He also announced that in future Budgets he will increase duty on all road fuels by at least 3 per cent. in real terms.

Other measures to improve fuel efficiency include an emissions check into the MOT test which encourages people to keep their engines in tune and the introduction of speed limiters for new heavy lorries since August 1992 and for many of the heaviest existing lorries from August 1993.

We are encouraging the use of public transport by supporting the highest level of investment in rail for 30 years and we are working with the bus industry and local authorities on ways to make bus travel more attractive, for example, through traffic management measures to speed up journey times.

London Ring Rail

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 16 July, *Official Report*, column *862*, on the London ring rail, if he will place in the Library details of his response to the proposals of S. B. Tietz and Partners.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* We were very interested to read the proposals which were sent to the Department last year. However it is for British Rail—and, in the longer term, for Railtrack—to consider whether such a project would be worth while and what priority it might deserve in their investment plans. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport sent a reply to Mr. Tietz explaining this.

Road Construction

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the economic impact of road construction for urban regeneration.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Secretary of State includes economic revival in inner cities as one of his objectives for local authority transport investment. New roads will be able to improve access to and within certain urban areas, and ease traffic congestion making them more attractive places for people to live and work. Transport supplementary grant support for road projects in urban areas is particularly targeted at the 57 Action for Cities locations. However, the Government recognise that there is a limit to the extent to which the construction of new roads can assist inner city areas, and looks to local authorities, where appropriate for their area, to bring forward alternative proposals for dealing with traffic congestion. Central Government support may for example be given towards measures to improve public transport infrastructure, calm traffic, and offer priority to buses.

London Underground

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next expects to meet the chairman of London Underground to discuss the development of the existing underground network.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the chairman of London Underground regularly to discuss a variety of issues, including development of the existing underground network.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about his Departments since April 11989; and how many have been accepted.

Mr. Dorrell: Copies of the Select Committee reports made since April 1989 which contain recommendations for HM Treasury, and copies of the responses made by the Government, are available from the House of Commons Library. The "Sessional Information Digest" lists Select Committee reports and provides reference numbers to Department responses where appropriate up to the start of the current Session. Similar information for the current Session can be found in the House of Commons "Weekly Information Bulletin".

Economy, London

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest assessment on the current state of, and prospects for, the London economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a statement to the House on the current state of, and prospects for, the national economy, in his Budget statement. It is not our practice to make local forecasts.

Drug Detection

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money HM Customs and Excise has been allocated in each of the last five years for the specific purpose of installing computer intelligence systems to detect drug trafficking.

Sir John Cope: The data are not available in the form requested. Over the past five years, money has been allocated to various computer projects in customs. A number of these include intelligence systems with a specific anti-smuggling function and so make a significant contribution to the detection of drug trafficking.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of *(a)* the Civil and Public Services Association and *(b)* the National Union of Civil and Public Servants to discuss the role of customs officers in drug detection.

Sir John Cope: The role of customs officers in drug detection was last discussed by the Minister responsible for HM Customs and Excise and a joint representation of customs trade unions, which included representatives from the Civil and Public Services Association and the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, at a meeting on 4 March 1992. There has since been discussion by correspondence.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of drugs seized within the United Kingdom and its waters in each year from 1988 came from or via other European Community countries.

Sir John Cope: The percentage by weight of drugs seized is shown in the table. The decline in the overall percentage for 1992 does not indicate a drop in quantities coming from or via the EC, but reflects a rise in quantities, particularly cannabis resin and cocaine, arriving direct from other countries.

Percentage

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	[2]*1992*
Amphetamine[1]	78	81	95	95	92
Cannabis herbal	4	50	67	7	44
Cannabis resin	46	40	60	62	27
Cocaine	36	65	3	6	8
Diamorphine (heroin)	13	24	58	30	44
Total via EC	22	41	61	65	32

[1] Amphetamine includes MDMA (Esctasy).
[2] 1992 figures are provisional.

Animal Smuggling

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were apprehended for smuggling animals into the United Kingdom during 1992.

Sir John Cope: Precise figures are not available on the number of people apprehended for smuggling animals into the United Kingdom.

There were, however, 54 seizures in 1992 of animals being smuggled into the United Kingdom. This figure does not include interceptions by customs of animals subject to rabies controls where subsequent action, as a matter of practice, has been passed to the local authorities.

Higher Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect the reductions in the top rate of tax since 1979 have had on restraining the rate of increase in (i) gross earnings and (ii) in the value of perks, share options and pensions for directors.

Mr. Dorrell: Growth rates of gross earnings, perks, share options and pensions for directors are determined by many factors, of which reductions in the top rate of income tax is only one. It would be extremely difficult to identify and measure the contribution of income tax rates.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in the United Kingdom pay income tax at the higher rate.

Mr. Dorrell: About 1·6 million.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the reason for his Department having had the majority shareholding in International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Portillo: The Treasury has not had any shareholding in International Military Services Ltd.

Car Tax

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue forgone by the Exchequer because of the abolition of the car tax.

Sir John Cope: Abolition of car tax has an estimated revenue cost of £100 million in 1992-93 and £750 million in 1993-94. The loss from 1993-94 onwards has been offset by an increase in road fuel duties.

Oil Taxation

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many proposals for oil wells in the North sea have been cancelled as a result of his Budget proposals.

Mr. Dorrell: We do not have access to information which would allow us to answer this question accurately.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what monitoring has been undertaken by his Department of the impact of changes made to the system of mortgage tax relief upon low-income mortgage-holding households; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The restrictions on mortgage interest relief that we introduced in 1988 apply in the same way to borrowers at all income levels. Low-income borrowers were not affected by the abolition of relief at the higher rate from 1991.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his assessment of the results of the Budget measures designed to assist the long-term unemployed.

Mr. Portillo: The Budget measures designed to provide over 100,000 more opportunities for unemployed people are being implemented as quickly as possible by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. They will be closely monitored to test their effectiveness.

Tax Returns

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much the Inland Revenue paid in postal surcharges for completed tax returns which arrived in envelopes that had no, or insufficient, postage in each year since 1990-91; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what estimates he has for the cost of supplying a reply paid envelope with each tax return; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The cost of supplying a reply paid envelope with each tax return would be about £2 million a year. Information is not held centrally on the cost of postal surcharges, but it is clear that this cost is relatively small.

British Telecom

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate of the likely overall cost of the forthcoming British Telecom share offer including consultancy, financial and legal advice, PR, marketing and advertising, underwriting, receiving banks' costs, selling commission and fees and overseas costs of share shops.

Mr. Dorrell: The costs of the BT3 share offer will be reported to Parliament after the sale has been completed. Sales proceeds will be appropriated in aid of the expenses of the sale.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the sum provided for the preliminary expenses of the 1993-94 British Telecom share offer in class XVII, vote 17 of the March 1993 Supply estimates has yet been spent; and when he intends to bring further supplementary estimates before the House.

Mr. Dorrell: Only part of the provision for preliminary expenses of the 1993-94 BT share offer in class XVII, vote 17 of the March 1993 Supply estimates has so far been spent. I will bring further estimates before the House for this expenditure as and when necessary. Proceeds of the sale will be appropriated in aid of the expenses of the sale.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much foreign investors have contributed to the public sector borrowing requirement in 1991 and 1992; what is the forecast for 1993 and 1994; what is the annual cost of servicing this increase in overseas debt from 1991 to date; what is his forecast for the rest of 1993 and 1994; and how the increase in the payments deficit will be financed.

Mr. Nelson: Annual net official sales of British Government stocks to the overseas sector for 1991 and 1992 appear in table 3.5 of the March 1993 edition of "Financial Statistics". Official forecasts of the level of such sales to the overseas sector are not available.

Statistical estimates of the interest paid to the overseas sector on holdings of British Government stocks are available on the Central Statistical Office databank, series XAMF, which is available in the Library. Official forecasts of the annual level of interest payable to the overseas sector on British Government stocks are not available.

The current account deficit forecast for 1993 is small as a percentage of gross domestic product and is expected to be readily financeable, and the measures put in place in the Budget should help to strengthen the United Kingdom's trade position over the years ahead.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the fall in the nominal and real rates of exchange between pound sterling and the individual exchange rate mechanism currencies, the dollar and the yen between August 1973 and February 1987 and *(b)* the corresponding change in the terms of trade for finished manufactures in trade between the United Kingdom, EEC and non-EEC countries, respectively; and what assessment has been made of the effect on output and unemployment between 1986 and 1988.

Mr. Nelson: Monthly and yearly average daily exchange rates between sterling and the US dollar, the yen and those countries that were members of the ERM during the period in question can be obtained from the CSO database and can also be found in chapter 13 of the CSO's publication "Financial Satistics". Reliable figures for bilateral real exchange rates over that period are not available but real effective exchange rate indexes covering the countries in question can be found in "International Financial Statistics" published by the International Monetary Fund. Prior to 1988, indices for terms of trade are available only on a whole world basis, but these can

also be accessed from the CSO database by the Library of the House. There are a large number of influences on output and unemployment at any one time and it is impossible properly to assess the effects of exchange rate changes in isolation.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he uses when deciding whether sterling is fully competitive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have no target for either the nominal or the real exchange rate. There are a number of ways of assessing competitiveness: for example, real exchange rates can be calculated using various price indices and there are also economic concepts such as fundamental equilibrium exchange rates and purchasing power parity exchange rates. The only way to secure competitiveness in the long term is for producers to maintain strict control over costs and to sustain a high quality of output.

Relocation

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to relocate Treasury civil servants to Inverness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: None.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the estimated increase in earnings of full-time male manual workers, not affected by absence, in manufacturing industry since September 1992 relative to the increase in the real exchange since sterling fell to DM2·30.

Mr. Nelson: Data on the earnings of full-time male manual workers, not affected by absence, in manufacturing industry are available only on an annual basis. Monthly data on the earnings of all employees in manufacturing industries may be found in table 5.1 of the *Employment Gazette*.

Series for various measures of the real exchange rate are published in "Economic Trends" (table 28). They do not yet extend to the period requested. However, the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" (paragraph 3.44) estimated that United Kingdom unit labour costs in manufacturing were unchanged in the fourth quarter of 1992 compared with a year earlier; while our competitors' unit labour costs in manufacturing rose by 3¼ per cent. Over the same period, the nominal exchange rate (ERI) fell by 12¼ per cent.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Abuse

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to control the spread of drug abuse in the inner cities.

Mr. Jack: The Government remain committed to improving all aspects of inner city life including combatting the problems of drug misuse. There is an established strategy for tackling drug misuse which aims to reduce both the supply of and demand for drugs. This involves the combined efforts of police and customs together with work on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation by statutory and voluntary agencies. The Criminal Justice Act 1991 has increased the scope for including treatment requirements in probation orders to deal with offenders with problems such as drug dependency. National anti-drugs campaigns have been run since 1985 and drugs education of all primary and secondary schools is now included in the national curriculum. Under the drugs prevention initiative, the Home Office has established local teams in 20 towns and cities in Great Britain. They are working with local communities in finding effective ways of preventing the spread of drug misuse and co-ordinating community preventive action. Some of the safer cities projects have also developed schemes to combat substance misuse. Widespread Government support and participation in European drug prevention week was also aimed at raising awareness of the benefits to be obtained from good preventative approaches.

Racial Attacks

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people during the last three years, to date, have *(a)* been killed and *(b)* injured in incidents which are accepted by the appropriate police forces as racially motivated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about introducing new offences connected with racial hatred and racial attacks; and what plans he has to propose such new offences as an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill [Lords].

Mr. Jack: The Commission for Racial Equality in its second review of the Race Relations Act 1976, recommended that consideration be given to specifically crimnalising racial violence and racial harassment. All the CRE's recommendations are now under consideration.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates have been made by his Department of the total annual cost of criminal activities of drug users in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: The involvement of drug misusers in criminal activity is difficult to quantify. It has not yet been possible to produce reliable estimates of the cost of drug-related offending, although work is continuing.

Custodial Places

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of additional custodial places which will be required if the Criminal Justice Bill *[Lords]* is amended as outlined in his statement of 13 May.

Mr. Jack: It is at present not possible to make any conclusive assessment on this matter.

Firefighters

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firemen were employed in each local authority area in England for each year since 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of firefighters—men and women—employed in the area of each fire authority since 1987 is given in the table.

Firefighters employed in each local authority area in England on 1 January each year since 1987

	1987		1988		1989		1990		1991		1992		1993	
	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained	Whole-time	Retained
FCDAS														
London	6,535	0	6,887	0	6,620	0	6,601	0	6,696	0	6,614	0	6,563	0
Greater Manchester	2,195	92	2,223	47	2,212	35	2,203	53	2,171	53	2,194	53	2,188	63
Merseyside	1,499	9	1,528	9	1,540	7	1,558	8	1,557	8	1,565	6	1,561	6
Tyne and Wear	1,084	20	1,073	32	1,072	18	1,084	22	1,085	23	1,068	20	1,077	18
West Midlands	2,122	68	2,079	4	2,074	20	2,086	10	2,096	11	2,097	10	2,095	10
South Yorkshire	1,088	101	1,093	138	1,068	144	1,068	109	1,067	99	1,041	93	1,030	70
West Yorkshire	1,862	245	1,873	288	1,874	191	1,950	240	1,969	223	1,885	210	1,830	198
TOTAL [1]	16,385	535	16,756	518	16,460	415	16,550	442	16,641	417	16,464	392	16,344	365
Counties—England														
Avon	639	178	650	179	644	180	636	169	641	166	650	174	640	182
Bedfordshire	308	129	311	123	290	125	296	133	308	123	310	127	309	126
Berkshire	423	134	420	141	426	125	426	119	422	127	433	133	434	136
Buckinghamshire	277	213	278	191	288	191	316	190	321	202	301	189	316	172
Cambridgeshire	268	294	268	286	263	284	270	284	265	309	266	291	267	288
Cheshire	609	209	613	199	624	182	623	182	618	159	614	141	638	133
Cleveland	632	64	633	64	652	62	657	60	649	60	658	61	641	59
Cornwall	178	392	179	387	181	384	179	392	181	396	185	393	183	379
Cumbria	290	364	295	373	295	359	293	404	296	370	294	380	287	382
Derbyshire	511	341	512	351	509	332	508	332	516	333	497	334	492	346
Devon	530	614	540	638	540	644	546	655	544	665	544	672	535	659
Dorset	309	290	307	282	303	280	308	285	302	284	309	303	307	313
Durham	422	157	415	144	423	150	419	159	435	147	432	142	429	143
Essex	870	380	893	379	909	367	904	378	912	382	906	396	922	403
Gloucestershire	225	235	225	231	233	250	238	252	227	248	226	243	232	253
Hampshire	756	541	759	552	755	552	745	5671	761	563	777	566	778	567
Hereford and Worcester	339	295	341	296	340	304	348	293	347	297	342	308	342	313
Hertfordshire	551	212	551	211	564	208	555	203	548	224	568	225	573	218
Humberside	739	255	732	267	738	268	751	260	734	265	744	261	724	257
Kent	825	676	842	670	868	643	887	656	891	692	897	695	908	682
Lancashire	935	388	952	376	964	379	957	365	963	379	967	380	974	374
Leicestershire	455	189	456	172	454	178	464	179	463	183	466	192	452	196
Lincolnshire	184	409	190	438	186	422	193	410	188	428	190	443	190	441
Norfolk	287	458	283	460	280	459	278	463	274	446	280	442	288	448
Northants	274	210	288	226	292	225	289	222	299	223	293	221	292	215
Northumberland	251	142	253	142	256	139	259	148	263	150	258	143	238	149
Nottinghamshire	613	275	615	270	621	254	622	258	614	254	610	270	613	266
Oxfordshire	223	256	222	255	224	248	226	250	238	227	225	230	229	229
Shropshire	208	216	207	216	209	217	199	214	205	222	206	215	203	236
Isle of Scilly	0	30	1	29	1	29	0	29	0	31	0	31	0	29
Somerset	161	364	161	352	163	350	165	359	168	360	167	367	172	369
Staffordshire	460	311	469	322	456	317	475	318	485	336	485	336	492	296
Suffolk	247	385	250	387	247	384	254	378	251	370	258	373	262	391
Surrey	677	112	681	116	674	109	707	103	697	94	697	106	691	114
East Sussex	437	212	438	224	441	220	429	228	433	235	429	230	436	245
West Sussex	366	280	368	277	367	280	368	293	371	284	376	294	395	302
Warwickshire	325	209	320	211	314	207	319	199	325	179	318	158	321	168
Isle of Wight	48	149	49	148	46	148	49	159	49	162	48	163	48	151
Wiltshire	183	267	188	268	192	265	200	257	205	274	209	288	206	290
North Yorkshire	385	422	397	418	398	427	401	429	403	425	405	390	405	414
TOTAL	16,420	11,257	16,552	11,271	16,630	11,147	16,759	11,238	16,812	11,274	16,840	11,306	16,864	11,334
GRAND TOTAL	32,805	11,792	33,308	11,789	33,090	11,562	33,309	11,680	33,453	11,691	33,304	11,698	33,208	11,699

Notes:

1. Fire and Civil Defence Authority (FCDAS) figures for 1987 as at 30 September 1986.
2. Retained figures are expressed in units of wholetime cover.

Drink-driving

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were convicted for *(a)* driving under the influence of drugs or *(b)* drunk driving in each police authority area for each year since 1989.

Mr. Jack: Numbers of convictions for driving after consuming alcohol or taking drugs are published in 'Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales, Supplementary tables', table 16. Copies of this publication for the years in question are in the Library.

The two offences are not separately identifiable from each other in the statistics collected centrally.

Obscene Publications

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were brought under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, in each year since 1990.

Mr. Jack: The number of prosecutions in England and Wales under the Obscene Publications Act 1959, as amended by the Obscene Publications Act 1964, rose from 174 in 1990 to 364 in 1991, an increase of 109 per cent. 1992 data will not be available until the autumn.

Suspended Sentences

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from judges and the magistracy about the restrictions on the powers to impose a suspended sentence under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Jack: We have received numerous representations from judges and magistrates about various provisions in the Criminal Justice Act 1991, but we cannot recall receiving any specific representations about the restrictions introduced by the Act on the imposition of suspended sentences.

Asylum Seekers (Angola)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to review his Department's position on applications for asylum and extension of leave to remain in the United Kingdom by applicants from Angola.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All applications for asylum, regardless of nationality, are carefully considered in accordance with our obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. Each case is assessed on its merits taking account of all the circumstances of the particular case, including conditions in the country of origin. We are keeping a close watch on developments in Angola.

Police (Presentation of Evidence)

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the procedure by which the police have to present evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service and also their evidence to the courts in order to increase the effectiveness of criminal prosecutions in England and Wales.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend recently announced a three-month study by consultants to see what can be done to reduce the burden of paperwork and bureaucracy on the police. That study will include a systematic analysis of the procedures by which the police present evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts.

Young Offenders

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons convicted young offenders with homes in the north of England have been held in Feltham young offenders institution over the last six months; and how many individuals have been involved.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 21 May 1993:

In the temporary absence of Mr. Lewis, the Director General, the Home Secretary has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question about why convicted young offenders with homes in the North of England have been held in Feltham Young Offender Institution over the last six months; and how many individuals have been involved.

There has been a rapid increase in the number of young offenders being sentenced by the courts to custodial sentences. The bulk of this increase has occurred mainly in the North and Midlands, and whilst we have tried to find places in establishments near to home, it has been necessary to utilise accommodation in the South. This has involved 25 young juveniles, most of whom have now returned to their home area. The two remaining are content to stay at Feltham and take advantage of the wide range of regime activities that are available.

Prison Department (Market Testing)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in respect of the market-testing exercise at the supply and transport division of the Prison Department, how many staff have so far accepted the redundancy terms which were imposed last October; how much the redundancy has cost; and what has been the cost of recruiting replacements so far.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Alun Michael, dated 20 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your Question about the market testing exercise at the Supply and Transport Branch of the Prison Service.

In September 1992, 106 staff at Branston and 31 staff at Leeds were issued with redundancy notices. Eighty-nine staff have accepted the redundancy terms offered and the total redundancy payments to be made to those staff is currently estimated at £687,000.

Recruitment of new staff for the Branston warehouse is being undertaken by local Supply and Transport management as part of their normal function. There were minimal administrative costs for advertising in the local press, postage, etc., which are estimated not to exceed £100.

Market Testing

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any non-governmental consultants currently assisting with Home Office market-testing exercises will in future be allowed to tender for any Home Office businesses.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Restrictions will be placed on consultants bidding for the service provision of a particular market test where they have undertaken work, connected with that particular business, either for the in-house bid team or the market testing unit.

Passport Agency

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Passport Agency framework document will next be reviewed.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is planned to complete a review of the United Kingdom Passport Agency's Framework Document between April and October 1994.

Police Mergers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a table or tables showing the list of those police forces regarding which a representation has been received urging that it be merged with another force *(a)* since he took office as Home Secretary and *(b)* in each of the previous 10 years; and how many representations in each case were made by (i) the police authority, (ii) the chief constable, (iii) serving police officers, (iv) local authorities, (v) magistrates, (vi) members of the public and (vii) other organisations.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 21 May, at column *343*.

Juveniles (Custody)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has of an increase in the number of juveniles aged 15 to 17 years who have been committed to custody, other than under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, over the last year; and whether any regional trends are apparent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 19 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of juveniles aged 15 to 17 years of age who had been committed to custody.

I attach a table showing the sentenced prison population aged 15-17 on 31 March 1993, together with corresponding figures for 31 March 1992. These indicate a slight decline in numbers. Separate figures are shown for the three Prison Service directorates. The Directorate of Inmate Administration (DIA) covers Wales and South West and Central England, the Directorate of Custody (DOC) covers London, South East England and East Anglia and the Directorate of Inmate Programmes (DIP) covers the East Midlands and Northern England. The establishment to which a prisoner is allocated depends on the availability of accommodation and so prisoners with homes in one directorate may be allocated to establishments in another directorate.

Population aged 15 to 17 under sentence[1] in prison service establishments in England and Wales: 31 March 1992 and 31 March 1993

Directorate	*31 March 1992*	*31 March 1993*
DIP	218	254
DOC	116	146
DIA	368	292
Total	702	692

[1] Excludes those committed under Section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy that any new regime for setting the level of fines shall ensure that there is an objective relationship between the level of the fine, the nature of the offence and the wealth or poverty of the offender.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 13 May, at column 939, his intention that the new provisions which replace the statutory unit fine scheme should still require magistrates who have decided that the appropriate penalty for a particular offence or offences should be a fine fully to consider an offender's means before settling the level of that financial penalty.

Auto Crime

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for each police authority in 1991 the number of known offenders found guilty or cautioned for offences of *(a)* theft or *(b)* unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle; and what proportion of the total number of known offenders in those categories were (i) juveniles and (ii) young adults;

(2) if he will list for each police authority in 1991 the number of known offenders for offences of theft from a vehicle; and what percentage of those offenders were *(a)* juveniles and *(b)* young adults.

Mr. Jack: The information is given in the tables.

Table A

Number and percentage of persons found guilty or cautioned for the indictable offence of theft of a motor vehicle[1] by police force area and age group 1991

Police force area	*10-16*		*17-20*		*All ages*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Avon and Somerset	20	18	51	45	114	100
Bedfordshire	94	67	23	16	141	100
Cambridgeshire	36	23	66	42	156	100
Cheshire	8	10	32	41	79	100

Police force area	10-16 Number	10-16 Per cent.	17-20 Number	17-20 Per cent.	All ages Number	All ages Per cent.
Cleveland	37	35	39	37	105	100
Cumbria	10	22	15	33	45	100
Derbyshire	42	33	52	40	129	100
Devon and Cornwall	39	20	69	36	192	100
Dorset	23	31	24	32	74	100
Durham	31	30	33	32	103	100
Essex	98	34	103	35	291	100
Gloucester	7	18	10	26	38	100
Greater Manchester	112	33	82	24	335	100
Hampshire	56	29	45	24	190	100
Hertfordshire	52	36	63	43	145	100
Humberside	76	46	39	23	167	100
Kent	147	38	126	33	384	100
Lancashire	20	18	36	32	111	100
Leicestershire	34	26	53	41	129	100
Lincolnshire	11	27	17	41	41	100
City of London	—	—	—	—	2	100
Merseyside	13	16	24	30	79	100
Metropolitan police	31	10	115	37	310	100
Norfolk	16	20	28	35	81	100
Northamptonshire	7	9	33	42	78	100
Northumbria	56	34	47	28	165	100
North Yorkshire	20	37	14	26	54	100
Nottinghamshire	62	30	69	33	208	100
South Yorkshire	136	45	78	26	302	100
Staffordshire	9	11	32	41	79	100
Suffolk	34	37	25	27	92	100
Surrey	33	38	31	36	86	100
Sussex	35	32	42	39	109	100
Thames Valley	61	30	67	33	204	100
Warwickshire	32	52	21	34	61	100
West Mercia	19	22	32	37	86	100
West Midlands	198	48	99	24	416	100
West Yorkshire	124	32	130	34	383	100
Wiltshire	3	7	21	48	44	100
Dyfed Powys	5	17	11	37	30	100
Gwent	21	33	22	34	64	100
North Wales	23	35	27	42	65	100
South Wales	46	25	68	37	184	100
England	1,842	32	1,886	32	5,808	100
Wales	95	28	128	37	343	100
England and Wales	1,937	31	2,014	33	6,151	100

[1] Theft Act 1968 Section 1.

Table B

Number and percentage of persons found guilty or cautioned for the summary offence of stealing and unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle[1] by police force area and age group 1991

Police force area	10-16 Number	10-16 Percentage	17-20 Number	17-20 Percentage	All ages Number	All ages Percentage
Avon and Somerset	112	19	338	57	595	100
Bedfordshire	89	31	130	45	289	100
Cambridgeshire	38	25	73	48	153	100
Cheshire	259	44	213	36	587	100
Cleveland	192	42	207	45	461	100
Cumbria	112	42	99	37	266	100
Derbyshire	122	36	137	40	342	100
Devon and Cornwall	135	30	188	42	452	100
Dorset	60	31	79	40	196	100
Durham	86	31	137	49	281	100
Essex	144	28	238	47	511	100
Gloucester	58	37	66	42	158	100
Greater Manchester	1,038	42	998	40	2,499	100
Hampshire	219	35	262	42	621	100
Hertfordshire	103	36	132	46	286	100
Humberside	195	46	163	38	428	100
Kent	102	32	156	49	319	100
Lancashire	249	32	346	45	769	100
Leicestershire	213	34	301	49	619	100
Lincolnshire	65	28	113	49	231	100
City of London	—	—	6	38	16	100
Merseyside	347	37	399	42	940	100
Metropolitan Police	1,116	37	1,203	39	3,053	100
Norfolk	111	36	134	44	305	100
Northamptonshire	34	17	116	57	204	100

Police force area	10-16		17-20		All ages	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Northumbria	433	41	462	43	1,064	100
North Yorkshire	66	29	108	48	224	100
Nottinghamshire	339	40	375	44	852	100
South Yorkshire	334	42	307	39	793	100
Staffordshire	176	34	229	45	513	100
Suffolk	64	32	91	45	200	100
Surrey	55	27	107	52	205	100
Sussex	98	22	214	48	444	100
Thames Valley	377	40	415	44	951	100
Warwickshire	63	33	96	50	191	100
West Mercia	206	42	194	40	491	100
West Midlands	864	40	911	43	2,139	100
West Yorkshire	742	39	789	42	1,895	100
Wiltshire	76	39	79	40	196	100
Dyfed Powys	53	34	63	40	156	100
Gwent	116	51	78	34	229	100
North Wales	93	36	108	42	259	100
South Wales	502	44	482	42	1,141	100
England	9,092	37	10,611	43	24,739	100
Wales	764	43	731	41	1,785	100
England and Wales	9,856	37	11,342	43	26,524	100

[1] Theft Act 1968 Section 12(1) as amended by CJA 1988 Section 37; being carried knowing vehicle to have been taken or driven away; unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle.

Table C

Number and percentage of persons found guilty or cautioned for the indictable offence of theft from a vehicle[1] by police force area and age group 1991

Police force area Police force area	10-16		17-20		All ages	
	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Avon and Somerset	26	10	163	63	259	100
Bedfordshire	77	48	53	33	159	100
Cambridgeshire	42	21	100	51	196	100
Cheshire	47	18	137	51	267	100
Cleveland	122	40	127	42	305	100
Cumbria	63	55	42	37	114	100
Derbyshire	66	21	159	50	317	100
Devon and Cornwall	29	21	72	51	141	100
Dorset	35	24	62	42	148	100
Durham	52	27	92	48	190	100
Essex	118	23	258	50	513	100
Gloucester	44	25	85	49	175	100
Greater Manchester	370	41	351	39	895	100
Hampshire	141	28	230	46	505	100
Hertfordshire	52	18	184	63	291	100
Humberside	110	26	217	52	420	100
Kent	94	22	216	50	434	100
Lancashire	101	34	138	47	293	100
Leicestershire	122	27	228	50	457	100
Lincolnshire	22	12	95	53	180	100
City of London	5	17	7	24	29	100
Merseyside	179	58	88	29	308	100
Metropolitan police	479	33	557	38	1,459	100
Norfolk	50	32	74	47	158	100
Northamptonshire	14	17	41	51	80	100
Northumbria	214	38	225	39	570	100
North Yorkshire	46	28	77	46	167	100
Nottinghamshire	154	30	217	42	507	100
South Yorkshire	144	27	240	46	524	100
Staffordshire	75	48	57	36	157	100
Suffolk	34	28	53	43	122	100
Surrey	12	12	58	59	98	100
Sussex	64	19	174	52	336	100
Thames Valley	158	37	193	46	423	100
Warwickshire	61	37	74	44	167	100
West Mercia	60	34	79	45	177	100
West Midlands	529	50	348	33	1,050	100
West Yorkshire	337	35	414	44	950	100
Wiltshire	36	24	74	50	148	100
Dyfed Powys	35	50	26	37	70	100
Gwent	58	38	68	44	154	100
North Wales	39	20	100	51	195	100
South Wales	164	44	135	36	373	100
England	4,384	32	6,055	44	13,689	100

Police force area	10-16		17-20		All ages	
Police force area	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
Wales	296	37	329	42	792	100
England and Wales	4,680	32	6,384	44	14,481	100

[1] Theft Act 1968 Section 1.

Unit Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he made of the effect of raising the upper disposable weekly income limit used in the unit fine system from the £25 employed in the four pilot schemes to the £100 used in the scheme brought into effect by the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. Jack: Within the maximum fine levels then permitted by law, the upper unit values in the four pilot unit fines schemes were determined individually by the courts involved. When Parliament was invited to approve increases in the maximum levels of fines that might be imposed by a magistrates court, at the same time as it was asked to approve a statutory unit fine scheme, it was understood that the effects would be likely to include an increase in the amounts of fines imposed on offenders with comparatively high incomes and a decrease in the amounts imposed on the less well off and that courts would be likely, in the case of the more serious offences with which they had to deal, to use their maximum sentencing powers.

Juveniles (Supervision Orders)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many supervision orders with residence requirements have been imposed upon juveniles by courts in England and Wales over the last period for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: The Children Act 1989 introduced powers which enable the courts to include a requirement in a supervision order that a child or young person shall live for a specified period in local authority accommodation. Information about the numbers subject to the requirement will not be available until the autumn of 1993.

Deportations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, after being detained under the Immigration Act 1971, were subsequently deported in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Information on persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process is given in table 15 of the Home Office statistical bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Third and Fourth Quarters and Year 1992", a copy of which is in the Library. Precise information on the number of such persons who had been detained under the Immigration Act 1971 immediately prior to deportation is not available, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been removed or deported as illegal entrants on the basis of false declarations about accommodation in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration Detentions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many individuals have been held in detention under the Immigration Act 1971 in each year since 1990; and how many were attempting to enter the United Kingdom as students, visitors and asylum seekers;

(2) how many individuals were held in detention *(a)* on arrival in the United Kingdom and *(b)* after arrival in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The available information is given in the table; the statistics do not identify the basis on which the person sought entry to the United Kingdom.

	1990	1991	1992
Passengers detained overnight or longer on arrival	9,007	8,016	6,918
Persons detained overnight or longer after entry[1]	3,607	4,578	4,666

[1] People dealt with under deportation powers.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals seeking asylum were *(a)* held in detention centres and *(b)* detained in prison or police stations in each year since 1990.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Asylum seekers are not identified separately in the statistics on total persons detained under the Immigration Act 1971. The only readily available information is of the number of asylum seekers who had been detained for more than a month at the points of time given in the table.

Asylum applicants[1] detained for more than one month at certain points of time, by place of detention.

	26 April 1991	3 April 1992	19 May 1993
Harmondsworth	33	42	66
Haslar	36	37	81
Her Majesty's Prisons[2]	51	48	137
Total	120	127	284

[1] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subcequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work. For the latter, the figures exclude persons whose asylum application was refused and who remained in detention pending removal.

[2] No such cases were held in police stations.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are to increase the number of detention centres for those held under the Immigration Act 1971.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Work started in March on the redevelopment of a vacant Prison Service establishment at Campsfield house, Kidlington, near Oxford, to provide up to 200 additional places for immigration detainees.

Further possible options, including the creation of additional facilities close to Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports, are under consideration, but no final decision has yet been taken.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the costs in each year since 1990 of running detention centres for those held under the Immigration Act 1971; and what are the projected costs for 1994 and 1995.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Immigration detention centres are managed under contract, and the costs involved are not disclosed on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

Refugees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 April, *Official Report*, columns *216-17*, if he will publish the standing instructions issued on the practice of issuing travel documents to those in the United Kingdom on exceptional leave to remain on asylum grounds in the years 1991, 1992 and 1993; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The answer that I gave on 28 April, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, explained that applications for Home Office travel documents from those granted exceptional leave are considered on their individual merits. It has been our long-standing practice not to publish internal staff instructions.

Ex-Detainees (Yugoslavia)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many ex-detainees from the former Yugoslavia have arrived in the United Kingdom since November 1992.

Mr. Charles Wardle: A total of 235 ex-detainees and 374 dependants from the former Yugoslavia have so far arrived under the arrangements I announced on 30 November 1992.

Racially Motivated Crime

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to police forces in the United Kingdom about the criteria in defining crime as being racially motivated; and what representations he has received concerning such definition and the recording by the police of racially motivated crime.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All police forces in England and Wales use the definition of racial incidents set out in the 1991 report of the interdepartmental racial attacks group. The definition is as follows:

> Any incident in which it appears to the reporting or investigating officer that the complaint involves an element of racial motivation, or any incident which includes an allegation of racial motivation by any person.

All forces systematically monitor reported racial incidents and HM inspectorate of constabulary collects statistics centrally.

My right hon. and learned Friend has not received any representations about the above definition or about the police recording of racially motivated crime.

Adolescent Psychiatric Service

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the establishment of a national forensic adolescent psychiatric service.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

Services for mentally disordered adolescents are currently provided by a number of agencies including the national health service, social services, the youth treatment service and the independent sector. The recent Department of Health/Home Office review of services for mentally disordered offenders– Cm 2088—included those relating to children and adolescents.

HEALTH

Child Mortality

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the top 20 causes of death for children aged under 18 years in each year since 1979 and the number of deaths in those years from those 20 causes by sex.

Mr. Sackville: The exact information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information by "International Classification of Diseases" (9th edition) chapter heading, by sex and for the age-group one to 19 years (inclusive) is, however, readily available and will be placed in the Library.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the top 20 causes of death in children aged nought to one and one to 16 years for each of the last five years;

(2) what were the 20 commonest causes of death for children aged under one year and the numbers of death by sex for each year since 1979.

Mr. Sackville: The exact information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information by "International Classification of Diseases" (9th edition) chapter heading, by sex and for the age-groups nought to one year (28 days to 11 months inclusive) and one to 14 years (inclusive) is, however, readily available and will be placed in the Library.

Gluten-free Foods

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to change the reimbursable status of gluten-free foods and low protein products; how many patients suffering from coeliac disease and metabolic disorders currently benefit from the present arrangements; what is the annual cost; when she expects the committee on borderline substances to report on the future status of currently available products; and if she will hold discussions with the manufacturers of these products and representatives of sufferers.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to change the reimbursable status of gluten-free foods and low protein products. The independent Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances will, however, be reviewing products in these categories later in the year. Its remit is to ensure that such products which have therapeutic use in the treatment of disease in the community can be provided as economically as possible under the national health

service. Patients' needs will be taken into account and they will continue to receive products which are necessary to treat their condition under the NHS. We expect the committee to complete this task early next year and manufacturers who may be affected will be given the opportunity to present information to the committee before their products are reviewed. A total of 998,100 prescriptions for foods for special diets were dispensed by community pharmacists, dispensing doctors and for personal administration, in England in 1992 at a total cost of £14·9 million. Details on the number of patients are not available.

Birth Statistics

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many miscarriages, stillbirths and children born alive were recorded in each year since 1988.

Mr. Sackville: The numbers of live births and stillbirths which occurred in England and Wales from 1988 to 1992 are shown in the table. The total number of miscarriages is not known.

Live and Stillbirths England and Wales 1988-1992

	Live births	*Stillbirths*
1988	693,577	3,382
1989	687,725	3,236
1990	706,140	3,256
1991	699,217	3,254
1992	689,656	[1]3,160

[1] The figures given for 1992 include 216 stillbirths of 24 to 27 weeks gestation which occurred between 1 October and 31 December. On 1 October 1992 the legal definition of a stillbirth was altered from a baby born dead after 28 completed weeks gestation or more, to one born dead after 24 completed weeks gestation or more.

Cancer (Specialty Review)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to undertake consultations before deciding whether to implement any recommendations of the specialty review on cancer.

Mr. Sackville: The standard consultation procedures will be followed for any change of use of hospital premises arising from the acceptance of options presented by the review.

Medicines Bodies (Membership)

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names and positions of the current membership of *(a)* the Committee on the Review of Medicines, *(b)* the British Pharmacopoeia Commission, *(c)* the Committee on the Safety of Medicines, *(d)* the Medicines Control Agency and *(e)* the Medicines Commission.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

MEDICINES COMMISSION (MC)

Professor Dame Rosalinde Hurley, DBE LLB MD DUniv(Surrey) FRCPath FFPM(Hon) FRCOG (Chairman)
Professor of Microbiology, Royal Postgraduate Medical School's Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of London

Professor I. D. Aitken, PhD BVMS MRCVS
Director of Animal Diseases Research Association, Moredun Research Institute, Edinburgh

M. J. S. Butler Esq, BSc(Econ)
Lecturer in Politics and Public Administration, University of Kent. Former Chairman of Association of CHC's for England and Wales

Dr. M. G. Carter, MB ChB BPharm DipPharmMed FRPharmS MCPP FFPM
Director, Zeneca Pharmaceuticals

Professor J. G. Collee, CBE MD FRCPath FRCP(E)
Emeritus Professor of Medical Microbiology, University of Edinburgh

Professor P. F. D'Arcy, OBE DSc BPharm PhD FRPharmS CChem FRSC FPSNI
Professor of Pharmacy, Queen's University, Belfast

Professor A. D. Dayan, MD FRCP FRCPath FIBiol FFPM
Professor of Toxicology, St Bartholomew's Hospital, London

Dr. Sheila Gore MA PhD
Senior Statistician, Medical Research Council Biostatistics Unit, Cambridge

Miss Joan Greenleaf, OBE BA FRPharmS
Former Regional Pharmaceutical Officer, North East Thames RHA

B. D. Hoskin Esq, BVMS MRCVS
Consultant to Veterinary Pharmaceutical Industry

Professor C. N. Hudson, MChir FRCS FRCOG FRACOG
Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London

Professor T. M. Jones, BPharm PhD FRPharmS CChem FRSC MCPP
Director, Research, Development and Medical, Wellcome Foundation Ltd.

Professor D. G. McDevitt, MD DSc FRCP FRCPEd FRCPI FFPM
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Dundee

Professor P. Reilly, MD Belf. MB BCh BAO FRCGP
Professor of General Practice, Queen's University of Belfast

Dr. A. G. Renwick, BSc PhD DSc
Reader in Clinical Pharmacology, University of Southampton

Professor John Rhodes, MD FRCP BSc ChB
General Physcian, University Hospital of Wales

Professor P. S. J. Spencer, BPharm PhD(London) DSc(Wales) CBiol FIBiol MCPP FRPharmS
Professor of Pharmacology and Head of School, Welsh School of Pharmacy, University of Wales, Cardiff

Gordon Tuck Esq, LLB
Barrister, Legal Director for Europe and Africa, Miles Ltd.

Professor D. W. Vere, MD FRCP FFPM(Hon)
Professor of Therapeutics, University of London

Dr. D. R. Williams, BSc PhD CChem FRSC
Chief Chemist and Company Quality Manager, BOCM Silcock Central Laboratory

H. Cowan Wilson Esq, BVMS FRCVS
General Veterinary Practitioner, Fife

COMMITTEE ON SAFETY OF MEDICINES (CSM)

Professor M. D. Rawlins, BSc MD FRCP(Lon) FRCP(Ed) FFPM: Chairman
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Newcastle University

Professor A. M. Breckenridge, MD MSc FRCP FRCPE FRSE
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Liverpool University

Dr. Kate L. Costeloe, MA MB BChir FRCP
Senior Lecturer in Child Health and Consultant Paediatrician, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London

Dr Janet H. Darbyshire, MSc (Epidemiol) MBChB FRCP
Head of the MRC's HIV Clinical Trials Centre, Brompton Hospital, Hon. Consultant in Thoracic Medicine and Hon. Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology, Brompton Hospital

Professor D. S. Davies, BSc PhD CChem FRSC
Professor of Biochemical Pharmacology, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital, London

Professor Anne Ferguson, PhD FRCP FRCPath FRSE
Professor of Gastroenterology, and Head of Department of

Medicine, Edinburgh University

Professor A. T. Florence, DSc FRSC FRSE FRPharmS
Dean of the School of Pharmacy, London University

Professor A. M. Geddes, MB ChB(Ed) FRCP(Lon) FRCP(Ed)
Head of Department of Infection, Birmingham University and Consultant Physician, East Birmingham Hospital

Professor E. C. Gordon-Smith, FRCP FRCPath
Professor of Haematology, St. George's Hospital Medical School, London

Professor K. Gull, BSc PhD
Professor and Head of Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Manchester University

Professor H. S. Jacobs, BA MD FRCP
Professor of Reproductive Endocrinology, University College and Middlesex School of Medicine, London

Dr. W. A. Jerrett, MB BCh FRCGP
General Practitioner, Glamorgan

Dr. B. J. Kirby, MB ChB FRCP
Consultant Physician, Postgraduate Medical School, Exeter University

Miss Gillian C. L. Lachelin MA MD FRCOG
Reader and Hon. Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, University College and Middlesex School of Medicine, London

Professor M. J. S. Langman BSc MD FRCP
Professor of Medicine and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Birmingham University

Professor D. H. Lawson MD FRCP(Ed) FRCP(Glas)
Consultant Physician, Glasgow Royal Infirmary and Visiting Professor Strathclyde University

Dr. A. V. P. MacKay MA BSc(Pharm) MB ChB PhD(Cantab) FRCPsych FRCP(Edin)
Physician Superintendent and McIntosh Lecturer in Psychological Medicine, Glasgow University

Professor J. M. Midgley BSc MSc PhD CChem FRSC FRPharmS
Professor of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, Strathclyde University

Professor B. K. Park BSc PhD
Professor of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, Liverpool University

Professor J. C. Petrie MB ChB FRCP(Ed) FRCP FFPM
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Aberdeen University

Professor Alain Li Wan Po BPharm BA PhD FRSC MRPharmS MPS(N.I.)
Director of School of Pharmacy, and Professor of Pharmaceutics, Queen's University, Belfast

Professor Anne E. Tattersfield, MD, FRCP
Professor of Respiratory Medicine, Nottingham University

British Pharmocopeia Commission (BPC)

Professor D. Ganderton, BPharm, PhD, FRPharmS (Chairman)
Visiting Professor of Pharmaceutics, University of London

Professor P. Turner, CBE, MD, BSc, FRCP, FFPM, Hon.MRPharmS, FIBiol
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of London

Mr. W. G. Allen, MRCVS
a Veterinary Surgeon

Professor A. O. Betts, BSc, MA, PhD, MRCVS
Professor Emeritus, University of London; formerly Principal of The Royal Veterinary College, University of London

Dr. D. H. Calam, MA, DPhil, Hon.MRPharmS, CChem, FRSC
Head of Chemistry Division, National Institute for Biological Standards and Control

Mr. A. C. Caws, BSc CChem, MRSC
Formerly a Senior Analyst in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Professor A. F. Fell, BPharm, PhD, FRPharmS, CChem, FRSC, FIQA
Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry, University of Bradford

Professor J. A. Goldsmith, BSc, PhD, CChem, FRSC, FIQA
Formerly a Director of Technical Operations in the Pharmaceutical Industry; Visiting Professor, University of Strathclyde

Dr. E. Griffiths, BSc, PhD, DSc, CChem, FRSC
A member of the Division of Bacteriology, National Institute of Biological Standards and Control

Professor J. M. Midgley, BSC, MSc, PhD, FRPharmS, CChem, FRSC
Professor of Pharmaceutical and Medicinal Chemistry, University of Strathclyde

Professor G. F. Phillips, OBE, MSc, Hon.MRPharmS, CChem, FRSC
Formerly Superintendent, Environmental and Forensic Services, Laboratory of the Government Chemist; Visiting Professor of Analytical Chemistry, Glasgow Polytechnic

Professor L. E. Ramsay, MB ChB, FRCP
Consultant Physician, Royal Hallamshire Hospital; Professor of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Sheffield

Dr. N. Randall, PhD, CChem, FRSC, FIQA
A Director of Quality Assurance in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Dr. G. D. Rees, BPharm, PhD, MRPharmS, CChem, FRSC, FIQA
A Manager of Quality Assurance in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Dr. B. A. Wills, BPharm, PhD, FRPharmS, CChem, FRSC
Formerly Chief Pharmacist, Department of Health

Dr. H. E. C. Worthington, BPharm, PhD, FRPharmS, Diploma of the Plastics Institute
A Head of Pharmacy, Research and Development in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The Committee on the Review of Medicines (CRM) was disestablished on 31 March 1992, following the completion of its review of the safety, quality and efficacy of substances or articles in respect of which product licences of right were granted, in accordance with section 25 of the Medicines Act 1968. The membership of the CRM was published in its last annual report for 1991. Copies are available in the Library.

The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) is an executive agency of the Department of Health. Dr. K. H. Jones, its chief executive and director, is responsible and accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the day to day management of the licensing of medicines for human use and its associated activities—the responsibility of Ministers ('the UK Licensing Authority')—under the provisions of the Medicines Act 1968 and associated European directives.

In accordance with statutory requirements, the annual reports for the MC, CSM, BPC and MCA are presented to Parliament each year.

Referrals

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra-contractual referrals were made and how many were refused in each regional health authority between April 1992 and September 1992.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects to be able to announce the chairman and terms of reference of the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee.

Mr. Sackville: Professor Dame June Lloyd has today been appointed as chairman of the Gene Therapy Advisory Committee (GTAC). The terms of reference for the committee are as follows:

To consider and advise on the acceptability of proposals for gene therapy research on human subjects, on ethical grounds, taking account of the scientific merits of the proposals and the potential benefits and risks.

To work with other agencies which have responsibilities in this field, including local research ethics committees, and agencies with statutory responsibilities—the Medicines Control Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of the Environment.

To provide advice to United Kingdom Health Ministers on developments in gene therapy research and their implications.

The membership of GTAC will be announced later.

Elderly People (Abuse)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration she has given to issuing model practice guidance on unreported abuse of elderly people for social services departments to issue to their staffs; and what scope she sees for social services departments to offer training on such abuse to all staff involved in direct work with elderly people.

Mr. Yeo: The social services inspectorate has drawn up practice guidelines which will be published this summer.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will undertake a review of legislation on protecting elderly people's property, social workers' powers to intervene in cases of abuse and registration of private domiciliary care; and what action her Department has taken to raise awareness of the extent of unreported abuse of elderly people.

Mr. Yeo: Proposals from the Law Commission "Mentally Incapacitated and Other Vulnerable Adults: Public Law Protection" (Consultation Paper No. 130), which are relevant to areas of concern about elder abuse, have recently been published, and the Department will be responding to the Commission. We have no plans to introduce compulsory registration of domiciliary care agencies.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will meet the editor of "Community Care" to discuss the prevention of unreported abuse of elderly people; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: No, but officials from the social services inspectorate are available to contribute to the "Community Care" magazine's current articles on this subject.

Mr. Graham Pink

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy to reimburse Stockport health authority for the costs of pursuing the industrial tribunal claim for unfair dismissal by Mr. Graham Pink.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. Any liability for costs rests with the employing authority.

Suicides

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women committed suicide in each of the last three years for which figures are available; in each case, how many of those suicide victims were homeless; and how many were known to be sufferers from either schizophrenia or another mental illness.

Mr. Sackville: The numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who have been recorded as having committed suicide, in each year from 1990 to 1992 are shown in the table. The number of those who have been recorded as having committed suicide and were homeless could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The number who have been recorded as having committed suicide and as being schizophrenic or suffering from another mental illness is not available centrally.

The numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who have been recorded as (i) having committed suicide and (ii) having died from an injury where it was undetermined whether that injury was accidentally or purposely inflicted, in 1990-92, England and Wales.

Cause of death	*Sex*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Suicide and self-inflicted injury	M	2,994	3,007	3,049
(E950-959)	F	956	886	903
Undetermined injury	M	1,338	1,355	1,310
(E980-E989	F	658	699	680

Homelessness

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what medical provision is specifically made available to homeless adults with children in *(a)* London, *(b)* Manchester and *(c)* Liverpool; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: General medical and hospital services are available to homeless people on the same basis as to the rest of the population.

Where the needs of homeless people for general medical services cannot be fully met under the normal arrangements, the Department is funding 30 projects designed to improve their access to primary health care. There are eight projects in the Greater London area and two in the Liverpool area.

The projects aim to improve access to medical services for homeless people, including adults with children. One scheme in Liverpool provides general medical and other health care services to a women's refuge and a child support refuge.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many women aged 50 years and over each year *(a)* have breast cancer diagnosed, *(b)* die from breast cancer and *(c)* receive treatment and survive;

(2) how many women aged under 50 years each year *(a)* have breast cancer diagnosed, *(b)* die from breast cancer, and *(c)* are treated and survive.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested is given for the number of deaths for the years 1983-1992 and registrations for the years 1983-1987.

The figures for five-years survival rates are published only by 10-year age groups from 1981 registrations, as shown in the table.

Number of deaths for female breast cancer (ICD 174) for England and Wales, 1983-1992

Year	Age group 0-50	50+
1983	1,523	11,149
1984	1,583	11,727
1985	1,534	11,979
1986	1,622	12,019
1987	1,590	12,161
1988	1,678	12,045
1989	1,694	12,314
1990	1,596	12,038
1991	1,555	12,231
1992	1,628	12,035

Number of registrations for female breast cancer (ICD 174), for England and Wales, 1983-1987

Year	Age group 0-50	50+
1983	4,289	17,008
1984	4,284	17,079
1985	4,549	17,515
1986	4,879	17,878
1987	4,866	18,874

Five-year survival rates for female breast cancer (ICD 174), for England and Wales, based on 1981 registrations, (which are only published by 10-year age group)

	Age group 45-54	55-64
Crude 5-year survival rate[1]	64·68	57·13
Relative 5-year survival rate[2]	66·22	60·63

[1] Represents the percentage of registrations alive at the end of each time span with a correction made for those registrations which are withdrawn.

[2] Represents the crude rates adjusted using the life table probability of surviving each time period.

Skin Conditions

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list those drugs and creams used for the treatment of skin conditions which will be included in the review to be carried out by the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs.

Dr. Mawhinney: The committee will consider all the drugs that are currently available on the national health service for the treatment of skin conditions. A list of these products is available in the Library.

Infertility Treatment

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on infertility treatment by the Gloucestershire district health authority in the latest year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Miss J. O. Trottér, the chairman of Gloucestershire health board for details.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) quadruplets, (iv) quintuplets and (v) sextuplets were born in England and Wales in each year since 1980; what was the total number of maternities in England and Wales in each year; and how many multiple births of each type in each year were conceived as a result of *(a)* in-vitro fertilisation, *(b)* gamete inter-fallopian transfer and *(c)* other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table (England and Wales):

Type of birth	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Twins	6,308	—	6,201	6,293	6,321	6,700	6,969
Triplets	91	—	70	89	80	93	123
Quadruplets	4	—	6	4	5	7	10
Quintuplets	1	—	—	—	—	2	2
Sextuplets	—	—	—	1	—	1	1
Total number of maternities with multiple births	6,404	—	6,277	6,387	6,406	6,803	7,105
Total maternities	654,501	632,350	623,511	626,277	633,965	653,142	657,308

Type of birth	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Twins	7,186	7,452	7,579	7,934	8,160	8,314
Triplets	125	157	183	201	208	202
Quadruplets	7	12	11	10	10	8
Quintuplets	1	1	1	—	2	1
Sextuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total number of maternities with multiple births	7,319	7,622	7,774	8,145	8,380	8,525
Total maternities	677,467	689,153	682,979	701,030	693,857	683,854

Information on multiple maternities is not available for 1981.
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Information on the number of multiple births attributed to assisted reproduction is not available. However some information on multiple pregnancies is published in the first annual report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, and in earlier reports of the interim licensing authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

RU486

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to require cases where RU486 is used with accompanying prostaglandins to be treated solely at family planning clinics; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the availability of foetal scanning equipment in family planning clinics which administer RU486.

Mr. Sackville: Arrangements for the use of RU486 are set out in the drug data sheet and are subject to the requirements of the Abortion Act 1967, as amended. The provision of equipment in national health service premises is a matter for local decision.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, column *765*, if she will now require regional health authority chairmen to provide substantive answers to hon. Members representing constituencies within the region in respect of requests for information on aspects of regional health authority expenditure.

Mr. Sackville: We do not require the publication of provisional information collected for management purposes. If the hon. Member has had difficulties in obtaining normally available information perhaps he will let me have the details.

Income Support

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is *(a)* the total amount of the assessed income support claims within the Yorkshire region for 1993-94 and *(b)* the Yorkshire regional allocation of the DSS transfer funding in respect of terminal illness special rate income support for 1993-94; what assessment has been made of the implications of the difference between *(a)* and *(b)* on hospices within the Yorkshire region; and if she will make a statement;

(2) what is the methodology used in determining the national allocation of the DSS transfer funding in respect of terminal illness special rate income support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Information about Department of Social Security (DSS) benefits is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security and for the DSS Benefits Agency. No transfer has been made specifically in relation to terminal illness higher levels of income support (IS). The £5 million transfer from DSS to the health service in respect of hospices was based on the number of hospice patients which it was estimated would have claimed the higher level of IS this year had the previous system continued. It was assumed that there would be about 500 claimants of the higher levels of IS in hospices in Great Britain in mid 1993-94. This was based on a 1991 study by "Help the Hospices", which found that 16 per cent. of hospice patients nationally received the higher levels of IS and that this accounted for about 8 per cent. of hospice income.

The allocation of the central funds from the DSS transfer to each region was based on weighted population. This meant that the funds for 1993-94 do not necessarily relate directly to the amount of IS payments received by hospices in a particular region in the previous year. This is because many hospice patients did not claim the higher levels of IS as their care was being provided free of charge.

Post-trauma Counselling

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to establish a post-trauma counselling service to provide immediate and expert counselling support for all those affected by large-scale tragedies; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Post-traumatic stress disorder is a recognised psychiatric condition. General practitioner services are increasingly able to respond to this condition and provide counselling or drug therapy as necessary. Cases may also be referred to the specialist psychiatric services. The Department is supporting from central funds the creation of a new victimology unit at the Maudsley and Bethlem Royal group specialising in post-traumatic stress, including research. We are also funding continuing work at the traumatic stress unit at the Middlesex hospital. These centres constitute an additonal national source of expertise in this condition.

Persistent Vegetative State

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are currently categorised as in a persistent vegetative state; and how many such cases were caused by *(a)* road traffic accidents, *(b)* physical assaults and *(c)* other causes.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not collected centrally. However, independent estimates suggest there may be about 1,200 cases in total in the United Kingdom.

Public Appointments

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the names of public appointments that she has made within the Mersey region, giving in each case the body to which the appointment was made, the position held, the relevant qualifications of each appointee and the remuneration that each currently receives.

Dr. Mawhinney: The names of public appointments made by the Secretary of State to national health service authorities and trusts within the Mersey region are as listed. Information on appointees' qualifications is not available centrally. Individuals are appointed to NHS authorities and trusts for the personal qualities, knowledge and skills that they bring to the post. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) on 5 May at column *91* for the present remuneration rates.

Appointments to Mersey RHA

Name	*Body*	*Position*
Prof. A. M. Breckenridge		Chairman
Mrs. J. E. Timms		RHA Member
Mr. J. R. Halliday		RHA Member
	Appointments to DHAs	
Mr. D. H. Tod	Liverpool DHA	Chairman
Mr. G. Murray	St Helens and Knowsley DHA	Chairman
Mr. R. S. Gordon	Wirral DHA	Chairman
Mr. S. H. Cussons	Macclesfield DHA	Chairman
	Appointments to FHSA	
Mrs. R. M. Hawley	Liverpool FHSA	Chairman
Mr. C. D. Darley	Sefton FHSA	Chairman
Mrs. M. Pearce	Wirral FHSA	Chairman
Mr. R. Brown	Cheshire FHSA	Chairman

Appointments to NHS Trusts

Name	*Body*
Chairmen	
Mr. A. H. Duncan	Wirral Hospital
Mr. J. R. Higham	St Helens and Knowsley Hospital
Mr. J. B. Fitzpatrick	Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Mr. F. A. Fenney	Broadgreen Hospital
Mrs. J. E. Hill	Cheshire Community Healthcare
Mr. M. F. Emberton	Countess of Chester Hospital
Mr. P. R. D. Hayes	East Cheshire
Miss L Brown	Southport and Formby Community Health
Mr. D. W. Hammond	Halton General Hospital
Mrs. J. Grundy	Warrington Community
Mr. N. Banner	Warrington Acute Hospital
Non-executive Directors	
Mr. J. W. Royle	St Helens and Knowsley Hospital
Mrs. J. L. Waitson	St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital
Ms B. N. Ong	Mid-Cheshire Hospitals
Mrs. S. Malthouse	Cardio-Thoracic Centre-Liverpool
Prof. Sir Robert Shields	Royal Liverpool University Hospital
Dr. Jennifer Ensor	Aintree Hospitals
Mr. R. F. Dewhirst	St Helens and Knowsley Community Health
Mr. J. Teare	Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology
Dr. G. Jones	Countess of Chester Hospital
Lord Wade of Chorlton	Countess of Chester Hospital
Mr. S. H. Bartlett	Cheshire Community Healthcare
Mrs. R. Phillips	Cheshire Community Healthcare
Mrs. V. Basford	Cheshire Community Healthcare
Mr. R. C. Hodson	Halton General Hospital
Dr. K. MacVicker	Halton General Hospital
Mrs. S. Anderson	Halton General Hospital
Mr. A. Weir	East Cheshire
Mrs. M. Loran	East Cheshire
Mr. S. Blenkinsop	East Cheshire
Mrs. C. Baker	Southport and Formby Community Health
Mrs. M. Jackson	Southport and Formby Community Health
Mrs. G. Gilbertson	Southport and Formby Community Health
Mrs. D. Lawson	Warrington Community
Mr. M. Davies	Warrington Community
Mr. P. L. Clarke	Warrington Community
Mr. P. Jeffrey	Warrington Acute Hospital
Mrs. J. Lang	Warrington Acute Hospital
Ms C. Bingham	Warrington Acute Hospital

Children (Behavioural Problems)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each year since 1985, by district health authority, the number of referrals by general practitioners of children with behavioural problems.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available centrally.

SCOTLAND

Sex Offences

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of rape crisis centres to discuss the conduct of rape and sexual assault cases in the courts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The conduct of rape trials is a matter for my noble and learned Friend the Lord

Advocate and his deputes, who undertake such prosecutions. They and procurators fiscal undertake prosecutions for sexual assault. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate is aware of the general views held by rape crisis centres and does not believe that a meeting would serve any particular purpose. If, however, representatives of rape crisis centres care to raise specific points of concern by writing to him, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate will be happy to consider them.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with health board chairmen, chairwomen and officials concerning the implications for their decisions relating to compulsory competitive tendering of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the acquired rights directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My noble Friend the Minister of State holds regular meetings with health board chairmen at which matters of common concern are discussed. In addition the national competitive tendering group, consisting of health board staff and officials from the NHS management executive in Scotland with responsibility for market testing, meets regularly. Guidance on the application of the regulations was issued to health boards on 11 March and further guidance on market testing will be issued shortly.

Witness Protection

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce a witness protection scheme in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to introduce a national witness protection scheme. Provision already exists in law to take action against people who threaten or injure witnesses. Decisions about the level of protection to provide for witnesses in individual cases are an operational matter for the police.

Cervical Screening (Greenock)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent information he has concerning the programme of reviewing of cervical smear slides from Inverclyde royal hospital, Greenock; what methods are being used to locate women who have left Inverclyde; when he expects the whole of the programme, including the re-examination of women recalled by the hospital, to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* Argyll and Clyde health board has informed me that some 12,000 slides have now been re-examined and a further 8,000 have been sent to laboratories for return next week. The board is on target to notify all the women who have been traced through NHS information sources of the results of the re-examination by the beginning of June.

The main method being used to trace women is through the "Community Health Index". The board has also contacted other health authorities and the USA naval authorities. The telephone helpline has also picked up changes of address. It is too early to say whether any outside agencies will be required to assist.

The board is making good progress with the review. The programme is expected to be completed in eight to nine weeks and on present progress will be achieved by the end of June. The preliminary results indicate that 90 per cent. of women have negative results. The majority of others are expected also to have similar results when the results of re-smears or investigations are completed.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to meet trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I met the trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme on Thursday 20 May.

Package Travel

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received about the EC package travel directive; and what measures he intends to take to help small travel operators to meet the demands of this directive.

Mr. Leigh: I have received numerous representations about the EC package travel directive, from trade associations, tour organisers, travel agents and consumer bodies. The implementing regulations were drafted to allow the widest possible measure of choice in meeting the requirement of the directive regarding security for pre-payments and against the cost of repatriation in the event of insolvency in order to help small travel operators.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many jobs have been created by firms which have received a loan under the loan guarantee scheme since 1983; what is the average number of employees employed by firms which have received a loan under the loan guarantee scheme; and how many businesses that received loans under the loan guarantee scheme since 1983 continue to trade.

Mr. Leigh: The information requested on the number of jobs created, and the number of employees employed by firms who have received loans under the loan guarantee scheme is not available.

From June 1981 to 31 December 1992 a total of 32,716 loans were guaranteed, of which 11,890 had defaulted on the loan during the same period. Of the remaining 20,826 loans it is not known how many businesses continued to trade after the loan had been repaid.

Telecommunications Companies

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many telecommunications companies are licensed in the United Kingdom; and how many of them are based *(a)* in the United States or *(b)* other foreign countries.

Mr. Leigh: Around 900 licences have been issued under the Telecommunications Act since it was passed in 1984, although not all remain in force. Companies may also operate under a number of "class" licences: these are generally applicable and are not issued in respect of individual companies. Information relating to the location and corporate nationality of licensed companies is thus not readily available and could not be obtained except at disproportionate cost. A list of licences is held at the library of the Office of Telecommunications.

BNFL

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance his Department has given to the serious crime squad of Cheshire police in its investigation into alleged financial irregularities at BNFL.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) on 19 May, *Official Report*, column *228*.

Company Turnover Statistics

Mr. Willetts: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many companies traded in the last year for which figures are available, with an annual turnover in the ranges *(a)* less than £37,600, *(b)* £37,600 to £50,000, *(c)* £50,000 to £100,000, *(d)* £100,000 to £200,000, *(e)* £200,000 to £300,000 and *(f)* above £300,000.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The latest information, on United Kingdom companies based on VAT data, is given in the table. It is not available in the ranges requested.

Number of VAT registered companies and public corporations in 1992

Turnover size £ (Thousand)	*Number of corporate business*
0	30,000
1-25	61,000
26-49	72,000
50-99	62,000
100-249	100,000
250-499	76,000
500+	166,000
Total	567,000

Small Firms' Awards

Mr. Richards: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many small firms merit award for research and technology stage 1 and stage 2 awards were won by companies in each region of the United Kingdom over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Between May 1992 and April this year the number of stage 1 and stage 2 small firms merit awards for research and technology (SMART) scheme were as follows:

Region	*Stage 1*	*Stage 2*
East	17	7
East Midlands	17	7
North East	8	3
Northern Ireland	6	3
North West	16	10
Scotland	17	13
South East	31	20
South West	20	13
Wales	16	8
West Midlands	18	14
Yorks/Humberside	14	10
Total	180	108

There have been a record number of entries to this year's SMART stage 1 competition. When the 180 winners are announced at the end of July over 1,000 projects will have been supported under the scheme since its inception in 1986.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Madden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to announce those areas to be designated as assisted areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 6 May, *Official Report*, column 206.

Departmental Staff

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many officials were employed by his Department to administer, inspect, regulate and advise businesses either directly, in agencies or on special contracts *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: On 1 April 1992 there was some 8,050 staff in the Department—including agencies and trading funds—engaged in these activities and some 8,000 on 1 April 1993.

Council of Industry Ministers

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *533-34*, what were the voting figures for each member state recorded in the meeting of the EC's Council of Industry Ministers held on 4 May.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* No formal votes were taken at the EC Council of Industry Ministers on 4 May.

Rolls Royce plc

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what was the value of financial support to Rolls Royce plc from his Department in the last available financial year; under what programmes that support was provided; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what was the value of aero engine launch aid receipts from Rolls Royce plc in *(a)* the last financial year, *(b)* in total since 1979 and *(c)* in total since 1972; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* My Department provided a total of £6,287,529 in financial support for Rolls Royce plc in the year ending 31 March 1993 under a number of schemes.

The value of aeroengine launch aid receipts received by the Department of Trade and Industry from Rolls Royce plc are as follows:

(a) £32·9 million was received in the last financial year ending 31 March 1993;
(b) £209·4 million has been received since 1979. Launch aid payments by the Government to Rolls Royce over the same period were £454·7 million;
(c) £239·4 million has been received since 1972. Launch aid payments to Rolls Royce over the same period were £580·9 million.

Aero Engines (United States)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of financial support to the United States aero engine manufacturers by the United States Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* The United States aeroengine industry receives no direct financial support from the United States Government. However, indirect support, primarily from NASA and the Department of Defense for research and development, is estimated by the United Kingdom industry to be approximately $700 million per annum. The high level of indirect support provided by the United States Government to its aircraft industry is one reason why the United Kingdom strongly supported the EC/United States agreement on trade in civil aircraft reached last year.

Small Businesses

Mr. Heppell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to make borrowing easier for small businesses seeking to expand after the recession.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 18 May 1993]:* Significant improvements to the loan guarantee scheme, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement, will be introduced from 1 July. There is an increase in the guarantee level from 70 per cent. to 85 per cent. aimed at those who lack security to offer against a loan. Also, for established businesses with a track record, the maximum loan size will be increased to £250,000. For all businesses, the premium payable to the DTI, by borrowers, will be reduced to 1·5 per cent. of the outstanding loan in respect of variable rate lending, to 0·5 per cent. in respect of fixed rate lending and to 0·5 per cent. for borrowers in inner city task forces and city challenge areas.

The Government are supporting five projects which are looking at ways of bringing together business angels—informal investors—and small businesses seeking investment.

DEFENCE

LPH Helicopter Carrier

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the source of the main propulsion engines for the LPH helicopter carrier; and what plans he has to encourage United Kingdom companies to offer to undertake their manufacture.

Mr. Aitken: The selection of the main propulsion engines for this ship is the responsibility of the prime contractor, VSEL, which has invited tenders from a number of engine manufacturers including United Kingdom companies. Industry was made aware of this opportunity by means of an MOD contract bulletin published in March 1992.

Sub-strategic Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 4 May, *Official Report*, column *20*, what specific contribution sub-strategic nuclear weapons make towards the United Kingdom's deterrence posture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The sub-strategic nuclear capability ensures the coherence of our overall deterrent posture by providing the essential link between conventional and strategic nuclear forces.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest assessment of the number of sub-strategic nuclear weapons deployed by Russia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Many Russian sub-strategic forces are being withdrawn from service and are earmarked for destruction, but it is estimated that some 12,000 warheads remain. Many of these are not assessed as being fully operational.

WE177

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement of 27 October 1992, *Official Report*, column *858*, when he expects to make an announcement regarding a possible future replacement for the WE177.

Mr. Aitken: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 20 May 1993 *Official Report*, column *263*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions have been taken by his Department following paragraph 12 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989 to ensure that the WE177 will remain serviceable well into the first decade of the next century.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We maintain a continuing monitoring programme of our stockpile of WE177 free fall bombs to assess their remaining life. Based on this, we now expect that the WE177 will remain safe and serviceable well into the first decade of the next century.

Defence Estimates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when was the last occasion on which the annual "Statement on the Defence Estimates" was debated by the House of Commons;

(2) how many times since 1963 the annual defence estimates have not been debated by the House of Commons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These are matters of public record.

Conventional Forces

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment of the balance of conventional forces between the North Atlantic Treaty

Organisation and Russia in (i) infantry, (ii) main battle tanks, (iii) armoured combat vehicles and (iv) combat aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: National declarations by signatories of the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty show that between the Atlantic and the Urals, the following forces are held by NATO and Russia at 1 January 1993:

	Personnel	*Main battle tanks*	*Armoured combat vehicles*	*Combat aircraft*
NATO	2,590,784	23,424	32,255	4,901
Russia[1]	1,298,299	8,893	18,834	4,387

[1] These figures represent the forces of Russia only and do not include the forces of the other countries in the former Soviet Union or the forces of the countries of the former Warsaw pact.

Trident

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Trident is capable of fulfilling the role of a tactical air-to-surface missile.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 May, *Official Report*, column *19*.

Templeton Airfield

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what use is made of the three communication aerials on Templeton airfield for purposes other than for his Department's communications.

Mr. Aitken: The aerials are used solely for defence purposes.

Nuclear Convoy (Erskine Bridge)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the breakdown of a nuclear convoy on the Erskine bridge on 18 May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A military convoy stopped near the Erskine bridge on 18 May while a defective tractor unit was inspected and replaced. At no time was there any danger to the public or convoy personnel. It is long-standing Government policy not to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any particular place or time.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those forms of advice and assistance provided by the British Frontier Service for soldiers serving in the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The British frontier services provides advice to the British military authorities in Germany on a variety of customs and immigration issues; it also advises and, where appropriate, assists individual service personnel, United Kingdom-based civilians and their dependants on these matters.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits (Automated Credit Transfer)

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 11 May, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, on automated credit transfer, if he will publish details of the type of building society or bank account held by 65 per cent. of pensioners and benefit recipients currently paid through the post office; and what percentage of these are savings accounts.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested. A limited survey was carried out in July 1991 on the type of accounts held by recipients of retirement pension, income support and child benefit only; information on recipients of other benefits is not available. The research asked only about accounts that were suitable for automated credit transfer—ACT—payments, and those that were not are excluded. It should also be noted that the income support figures contain a number of customers paid by girocheque, not all of whom may actually use the post office.

The information available is in the tables. Totals exceed 100 per cent. because many people have more than one type of account.

DSS customers using the post office who have accounts suitable for ACT

	Per cent.
Child benefit	
Bank account:	
Current, with interest	22
Current, no interest	41
Savings—deposit	16
Building Society:	
With cheque book	5
No cheque book	46
Other:	7
At least one account suitable for ACT	82
No such account/don't know	16
Refused	2
Retirement pension	
Bank account	
Current, with interest	23
Current, no interest	31
Savings/deposit	19
Building Society:	
With cheque book	4
No cheque book	41
Other:	17
At least one account suitable for ACT	83
No such account/don't know	17
Income support	
Bank account:	
Current, with interest	19
Current, no interest	10
Savings/deposit	10
Building Society:	
With cheque book	3
No cheque book	19
Other:	9

	Per cent.
At least one account suitable for ACT	55
No such account/don't know	45

Income Maintenance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates he has for the overall cost of provision for income maintenance in Wales; and if he will indicate *(a)* the estimated cash expenditures, *(b)* the estimated tax expenditures and *(c)* the estimated costs of administration.

Mr. Burt: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The only income maintenance cash expenditure information available specifically for people residing in Wales is expenditure on housing benefit and income support. The latest available expenditure figures are £380 million for housing benefit[1] for 1992-93 and £442 million for income support[2] for 1989-90. The latest estimates for personal tax allowances and tax relief on earnings and investments, excluding MIRAS, are around £6,740 million for 1990-91.

The latest estimate for the cost of the administration of all social security benefits by the Benefits Agency in Wales is £55·3 million for 1992-93. The estimated budget for the administration of tax in Wales for 1993-94 is £78 million[3].

Notes:

[1] Table 8.7 of CSO Regional Trends 27 (1992).

[2] Figures underlying Table of the Departmental Report (Cm. 2213).

[3] Excludes any apportionment to Wales for expenditure on forms and central computer systems.

Benefit Costs

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the daily equivalent cost per working person of spending on social security.

Mr. Burt: Based on estimates of the grand total of social security spending for 1993-94, the daily equivalent cost per working person is around £13.

Computerisation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the level of savings in costs and time brought about by the computerisation within his Department.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has achieved some £124 million savings from its computerisation programme operational strategy over the four years up to 1991-92, the latest date for which figures are available.

Over the same period, there have been corresponding improvements in claims clearance times for those benefits which changed from a clerical to a computerised system, as follows:

	Clerical System 1987-88 Days	*Computerised System 1991-92 Days*
IS Claims	6·1	4·0
RP Claims	24·7	15·8

Income Support

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women (i) under and (ii) over pensionable age are dependent on income support in Wales.

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table.

Numbers receiving income support in Wales

	Claimants and partners under age 60	*Claimants and partners aged 60 and over*	*Total*
Men	108,000	27,000	135,000
Women	124,000	80,000	204,000
Total	232,000	107,000	339,000

Notes:

1. *Source:* Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry May 1992.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. For the purposes of this reply the term "pensionable age" has been defined as 60 years old, this is consistent with the age at which Pensioner Premiums become payable with Income Support.

Compensation Scheme

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much compensation was paid to benefit recipients by the Benefits Agency in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will break this figure down by benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The latest year for which definitive figures are available is 1991-92.

A breakdown of the figures is only available for five benefits. The figures for these benefits are as follows:

Benefit	*Amount paid (£'s)*
Maternity allowance	294
Retirement pension	177,367
Widows benefit/pension	31,242
Invalidity benefit	80,639
Income support	459,849
Total	749,391

Figures for the remaining benefits are not kept separately.

Concessionary Bus Passes

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) when was the last occasion that Walsall council contacted his Department regarding the concessionary bus pass for those in receipt of the disability living allowance; what advice was given to the council in this respect; and if a Minister will now write to the council;

(2) what action his Department will be taking if a council refuses to follow its advice regarding those entitled to the concessionary bus pass;

(3) pursuant to his answer on 7 May, *Official Report*, column *299*, what has been the latest response received from Walsall council regarding allowing those in receipt of the disability living allowance to have the concessionary bus pass.

Mr. Scott: Walsall metropolitan borough council wrote to the Department on 10 May with the observations of the

council's lawyers on section 73(14) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. The Department is engaged in negotiations with the Council in an attempt to come to an agreement as to the scope of section 73(14) and its applicability to the council's concessionary fare scheme. The Department will consider, at the conclusion of those negotiations, whether further action is necessary.

Appeals Tribunals

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals sought appeals in *(a)* social security appeals tribunals and *(b)* medical appeals tribunals in the last year for which figures are available in (i) Strathclyde and (ii) Scotland as a whole; and what were the results of these appeals.

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the form requested since national administrative appeal statistics for appeal tribunals are not available for areas smaller than a former social security region; and since available figures give details of workflows rather than the outcome of individual appeals. The last full year for which figures are available is 1991. The table provides details for Scotland as a whole.

1991 social security and medical appeal tribunal statistics for Scotland

	SSATS	*MATS*
1991		
Appeals lodged	22,838	4,798
Not admitted	635	38
Lapsed	3,791	—
Withdrawn	1,681	223
Struck out/abated	3	4
Heard	7,589	2,662
For appellant	2,752	1,178

Source: DSS Annual Social Security and Medical Appeal Tribunal Statistics.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ballyconnnell Canal

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show the Intereg funding for projects in Northern Ireland for each of the last three years; what is the projection for the current year; what sums were expended on the Ballyconnell canal joint project; and what percentage of the total sums donated to Northern Ireland this represented.

Mr. Mates: EC funding from the Northern Ireland/ Ireland Intereg programme is designed to assist both cross-border projects and projects which fall within the eligible areas of either member state.

The figures in the table show EC funding expended by Northern Ireland under Intereg since the initiative was approved in July 1991.

	Northern Ireland expenditure under Intereg *£ million*	*Northern Ireland Intereg expenditure on Ballyconnell canal £ million*	*Percentage*
1991	4·9	0·5	10
1992	8·9	0·9	10
[1]1993	18·4	—	—
TOTAL	32·2	1·3	4

[1] Represents a projected figure and assumes that the value of the pound will remain 1·256 against the ecu.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much of the sums expended on the Ballyconnell canal joint project was expended on administration and support services; and how much on actual construction and remedial works.

Mr. Hanley: The Ballyconnell canal joint project is estimated to cost IR£30 million. Cumulative expenditure at 31 March was IR£23·69 million. This was in respect of feasibility studies and site investigations, land acquisition costs, construction costs, site supervision and project management costs incurred by the Electricity Supply Board in the Republic of Ireland. The Northern Ireland contribution to the project is capped at IR£2·4 million and cumulative expenditure at 31 March 1993 was IR£2·3 million. Details of the administrative overhead costs incurred by the two sponsoring Governments in overseeing the project are not available.

Charities

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to introduce legislation which will enable the Government to collect and release information about the charitable status of organisations in Northern Ireland and which will bring that part of the United Kingdom into line with England, Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Mates: The Government are reviewing the law relating to charities in Northern Ireland and this review will include the arrangements for the provision of information on charities to the public. Any proposals for a change in legislation will be presented in due course and consultation will take place in the normal way.

Fire Sprinkler Systems

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statistics he has on the effectiveness against fire of sprinkler systems fitted to buildings in Northern Ireland, including the percentage of occasions on which they fail to operate, or operate inadequately.

Mr. Atkins: There are no statistics available on sprinkler effectiveness. However the fire brigade reports that, in its experience, operational failures are extremely rare and that sprinkler systems provide a highly reliable method of automatically controlling fire.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the effect of blast on sprinkler systems fitted to buildings in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Depending on the severity and location of a blast and whether it is accompanied by fire, a sprinkler system may either be unaffected, or be activated by mechanical disturbance or fire, or be disabled as a result of damage to the building structure or the water supply to the system.

The fire brigade reports that, in practice, blasts caused by bombs or blast incendiaries have had little detrimental effect on the operation of sprinkler systems.

Interview Expenses

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people have received travelling expenses from the Training and Employment Agency for travel to a job interview in each of the last three years;

(2) how many people who received travelling expenses in each of the last three years from the Training and Employment Agency to attend a first job interview and who have been shortlisted for a second interview have been unable to attend because travelling expenses funding has not been allowed for a second interview.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question is a matter for the Training and Employment Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 20 May 1993:

You asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to state how many people have received travelling expenses from the Training and Employment Agency for travel to a job interview in each of the last three years.

The Information you requested is as follows:—

Financial Year	*Number of Approved Applicants*
1990-91	1,124
1991-92	1,363
1992-93	1,256

In a further question you asked how many of those included in the above who received assistance from the Training and Employment Agency to attend a first job interview and were short listed for a second interview were unable to attend because travelling expenses funding was not allowed.

All applicants who apply to the Training and Employment Agency for assistance under the Travel to Interview Scheme are formally advised of the conditions which relate to entitlement for support prior to this being given. These conditions are, that the applicant must not have had assistance under the Scheme for a previous interview for the same job. This arises from the fact that as limited funds are available, it is not possible to help at every stage of a lengthy selection procedure. Second interview applications are not accepted and as a result no statistical information is available in this area.

Building Regulations

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 19 January *Official Report*, column *175*, if the European Commission has yet completed its consideration of his proposals for amendment to parts E and EE of the Building Regulations (NI) 1990; and what observations the European Commission has made.

Mr. Atkins: The proposed amendments to parts E and EE of the Building Regulations (NI) 1990 have not yet been submitted to the European Commission.

Hostel Accommodation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average length of stay for single occupants of hostel accommodation funded by the DHSS in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: While the Department of Health and Social Services provides housing benefit assistance to many hostel residents, it does not fund hostel accommodation in Northern Ireland.

This is, instead, a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I have been advised by the chairman that although an average figure based on the length of stay of all single persons on hostel accommodation is not readily available, it is estimated that single persons who have been accepted as homeless and in priority need under the terms of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, and placed in hostel accommodation by the Executive, spend an average of 8·6 weeks there before being permanently rehoused.

Building Regulations

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to take account of the effects of the amendment to the England and Wales Approved Document B (Building Regulations, Fire) before deciding whether it should be followed in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: Northern Ireland Building Regulations closely reflect and are based on the equivalent regulations in England and Wales. In deciding that the fire safety requirements developed for England and Wales, and expressed in approved document B, should be adopted for Northern Ireland, account has been taken of the development of those requirements, the approved document in its final form and of experience of its operation since it came into force on 1 June 1992. The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland will continue to monitor the operation and effectiveness of the fire safety requirements of the England and Wales regulations.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment has been made of the sufficiency of the length of time of fire resistance required for a commercial building over 30 m in height in the proposed Northern Ireland Building Regulations (Fire) to offer adequate escape time in the case of fire arising from a terrorist incident.

Mr. Atkins: No specific studies have been undertaken of escape times required in the case of fires arising from terrorist incidents. However, experience of fires shows that there is little difference in growth rates between fires arising from such incidents and those arising from other causes, apart from the initial intensity. Northern Ireland Building Regulations presently require commercial premises over 28 m high to have two hours, fire resistance; they do not require the premises to be sprinklered. The proposed new regulations would require buildings over 30 m high to have the same fire resistance for elements of structure as

currently required, reducing to a minimum of 90 minutes for elements not forming part of the structural frame, and in addition, would require all such premises to be sprinklered.

EMPLOYMENT

Acquired Rights

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement about Her Majesty's Government's implementation of the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 19 January *Official Report* column. *183*, to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett). The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill will shortly receive its Third Reading in the House of Lords.

Youth Training

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will list the supply and demand of youth training places in each training and enterprise council area on a monthly basis for the last six months.

Mr. McLoughlin: Information on the availability of youth training places is not collected nationally. However, I am satisfied that there is sufficient YT provision available to meet demand. Information on the total demand for YT places is also not collected, but the number of young people who are registered with careers services in England, who are covered by the YT guarantee and have been waiting for a YT place for eight or more weeks in March and April is shown in the table. Information for the previous months is not reliable.

Young people waiting for 8 or more weeks for a place on YT: 1993

TEC	*March*[2]	*April*[3]
Avon	88	117
AZTEC	156	95
Barnsley and Doncaster	36	35
Bedfordshire	115	[1]164
Birmingham	110	131
Bolton and Bury	41	19
Bradford	15	18
Calderdale and Kirklees	18	15
CAMBSTEC	69	54
Central England	14	19
Central London	136	[1]152
CEWTEC	18	12
CILNTEC	143	109
County Durham	62	71
Coventry and Warwicks	79	[1]86
Cumbria	33	6
Devon and Cornwall	66	[1]71
Dorset	23	15
Dudley	2	1
ELTEC	19	29
Essex	373	329
Gloucester	28	11
Greater Nottingham	32	35
Greater Peterborough	23	17
Hampshire	207	[1]304
HAWTEC	19	[1]30
Heart of England	15	24
Hertfordshire	107	164
Humberside	47	36
Isle of Wight	37	28
Kent	338	183
LAWTEC	40	28
Leeds	37	26
Leicestershire	27	[1]31
LETEC	439	380
Lincolnshire	19	39
Manchester	106	[1]93
Merseyside	42	47
METROTEC	21	6
Milton Keynes and North Bucks	32	[1]42
Norfolk/Waveney	4	31
NORMIDTEC	13	9
North Derbyshire	42	39
North London	66	[1]79
North Nottinghamshire	91	55
North West London	111	107
North Yorkshire	79	[1]59
Northamptonshire	62	[1]39
Northumberland	47	58
Oldham	36	48
QUALITEC	20	16
Rochdale	18	15
Rotherham	4	9
Sandwell	10	20
South and East Cheshire	0	0
Sheffield	156	147
Shropshire,	19	24
SOLQTEC	206	194
Somerset	97	[1]114
South Derbyshire	25	[1]29
South Thames	476	451
Staffordshire	4	6
Stockport and High Peak	16	19
Suffolk	13	13
Surrey	94	[1]99
Sussex	66	86
Teesside	45	56
Thames Valley Enterprise	185	[1]198
Tyneside	60	[1]59
Wakefield	18	18
Walsall	3	12
Wearside	0	0
West London	36	48
Wiltshire	68	[1]68
Wolverhampton	2	6

[1] These figures are subject to final confirmation.
[2] 11 March 1993.
[3] 17 April 1993.
Sources: Information from Careers Service Management return (Supplement).

Employment Statistics

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for the numbers *(a)* employed and *(b)* self-employed; and what the equivalent figures were 12 months previously.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information is as follows:

United Kingdom

(Thousands)

Year	[1]*Employed*	*Self-employed*
December 1991	22,614	3,066
December 1992	21,992	2,936

[1] Employees in employment, H.M. Forces and participants on work-related Government training programmes.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest percentage and actual figures for *(a)* England and *(b)* the United Kingdom for (i) all adults and (ii) males aged 16 years or over recorded as economically inactive.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The latest estimates from the labour force survey—not seasonally adjusted—are given in the table:

Labour Force Survey

Thousands

	Adults	*Men*
England, Autumn 1992		
Total aged 16 and over	37,821	18,280
Economically inactive	13,841	4,763
	36·6 per cent.	26·1 per cent.
United Kingdom, Spring 1992		
Total aged 16 and over	45,205	21,809
Economically inactive	16,801	5,733
	37·2 per cent.	26·3 per cent.

WALES

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to publish a regularly updated list of deletions and additions to the list of members of Welsh non-departmental public bodies whom he *(a)* appoints or *(b)* advises on; and how many such names will appear in the first such list as an update to the list he published in answer to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 23 March, *Official Report*, columns *549-50*.

Mr. David Hunt: New appointments which I make to public bodies in Wales are regularly announced in my Department's press notices which are available in the Library of the House.

Income Statistics

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing *(a)* the top decile male earnings as a percentage of median male earnings, *(b)* the bottom decile male earnings as a percentage of median male earnings, *(c)* the top decile female earnings as a percentage of median female earnings and *(d)* the bottom decile female earnings as a percentage of median female earnings in Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1984, (iii) 1989 and (iv) 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is published in table 116 of part E of the new earnings survey. A copy for each of the years concerned is available in the Library of the House.

Employment Statistics

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were in employment in Wales in each year since 1984; and if he will indicate the number which were *(a)* full-time employees, *(b)* part-time employees, *(c)* full-time self-employed, *(d)* part-time self-employed and *(e)* on Government employment and training programmes.

Mr. David Hunt: Figures for men and women in employment and those on work-related Government training programmes may be accessed on-line by the staff in the Library of the House, although information distinguishing between full and part-time male employment was available in census of employment years only prior to 1989.

Estimates of the number of self-employed which are derived from the labour force survey and which may be subject to sampling variability are given in the table:

Self-employed

Thousands

	Men		*Women*	
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1984	107	[1]	25	11
1985	96	[1]	21	12
1986	104	[1]	23	[1]
1987	86	[1]	25	14
1988	94	[1]	24	13
1989	134	11	24	16
1990	121	[1]	23	15
1991	117	[1]	25	13
1992	121	[1]	22	17

Source: Labour Force Survey, spring of each year.

[1] Estimates below 10,000 are not thought to be sufficiently reliable to be published.

Education Spending

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of county council spending in Wales was allocated to education; and what proportion of the total spending of each county council in Wales was allocated to education for each of the last 10 years.

Sir Wyn Roberts: County council spending on education as a proportion of total county council spending on all rate/general fund services is given in the table. Figures are available on a consistent basis only for the last eight years.

Education (excluding school catering) as a percentage of total counties spending (a)

	Total counties	*Clwyd*	*Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*
1985-86 (b)	59	60	58	63	56	59	57	57	61
1986-87 (b)	60	60	59	63	56	59	58	58	61
1987-88 (b)	59	60	58	62	55	59	58	57	62
1988-89 (b)	59	60	58	62	56	59	59	57	61
1989-90 (b)	59	59	58	62	55	60	59	57	60
1990-91 (b)	59	58	58	60	54	60	58	57	60
1991-92 (c)	58	59	57	60	55	60	58	56	60
1992-93 (d)	58	59	57	59	54	59	57	55	58

(a) Net current expenditure
(b) Outturn
(c) Revised estimates
(d) Budgets; most higher education expenditure excluded, as function transferred to Central Government.

University of Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the student-tutor ratio in each of the colleges within the current structure of the university of Wales in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on staff and students at the colleges of the university of Wales is collated and published by the "Universities Statistical Record"—USR.

The ratios, shown in the table, are calculated as defined in the USR publications. Information for 1991 onwards has not yet been published.

Ratio of FTE of students to University funded full time academic staff[1]

Academic year beginning	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
Aberystwyth	8·6	8·5	8·8	9·5	9·2	13·4	13·5	11·0	11·0
Bangor	9·8	9·4	9·7	9·9	10·5	9·4	9·7	10·1	10·2
Cardiff	9·3	10·3	9·6	9·5	9·3	9·6	10·6	11·8	12·4
St. David's, Lampeter	9·8	11·0	11·5	11·5	11·0	10·6	10·5	11·0	10·7
Swansea	10·0	10·7	10·6	10·6	10·3	10·6	11·5	11·7	12·1
Welsh National School of Medicine	5·0	4·8	4·5	4·6	4·8	5·8	5·4	5·6	5·3
University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology	9·6	10·6	10·6	10·2	9·3	9·9	10·5	10·5	10·8

	1988	*1989*	*1990*
Aberystwyth	12·0	12·3	12·7
Bangor	10·7	11·9	13·0
Cardiff[2]	13·2	12·7	13·1
St. David's Lampeter	12·5	12·5	13·6
Swansea	12·3	14·5	14·2
College of Medicine	5·7	7·3	7·1

Notes:
[1] Ratio of full time equivalent student load to full time academic staff paid wholly from university general funds. The academic staff numbers exclude part time staff and those staff not wholly funded by the university.
The exclusions numbered 984 academic staff in 1990-91 or 34 per cent. of all academic staff recorded for the University as a whole.
[2] From 1988 the University of Wales Institute of Science and Technology merged with the University of Wales College Cardiff.
Source:
"Statistics of Education, Volume 6—Universities" and "University Statistics; Finance" published by Universities' Statistical Record.

Pregnant Women

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the number of pregnant women who have been dismissed from employment *(a)* with less than two years' service to the employer and *(b)* with more than two years' service.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Water Bill Debts

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many county court judgments have been obtained for water bill debts in Wales in each year from 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the water supply companies serving Wales.

Pharmacies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioner practices run their own pharmacies in each of the counties of Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The description "pharmacy" may be used only in respect of premises registered under the Medicines Act 1968. I am not aware of any GPs in Wales who run their own pharmacies.

All GPs may personally administer appliances or drugs, other than scheduled drugs, to their patients, and they are obliged to provide such appliances or drugs which are needed for the immediate treatment of a patient before provision can otherwise be obtained.

In addition, a GP can provide pharmaceutical services to a patient on his or her list where the patient has requested this and a number of conditions, which are specified in regulations, are met. The number of GPs providing pharmaceutical services under these arrangements in each family health services authority is given as follows:

Number of General Practitioners providing pharmaceutical services to their patients, as at 1 April 1992

	Number
Clwyd	51
Dyfed	17
Gwent	38
Gwynedd	57
Mid Glamorgan	20
Powys	47
South Glamorgan	8
West Glamorgan	5

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pharmacies there are in each county of Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is given in the table.

	Number of pharmacies[1]
Clwyd	88
Dyfed	99
Gwent	96
Gwynedd	62
Mid Glamorgan	142
Powys	23
South Glamorgan	99
West Glamorgan	98

[1] As at 30 September 1992.

NHS Staff (Attacks)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the number of violent attacks that have been committed against health service staff on hospital premises in Wales in each year from 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None. This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been convicted of committing violent attacks against health service staff within hospital premises in Wales in each year from 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These figures are not held centrally.

Hospitals (Thefts)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what has been the number of reported thefts from each acute treatment hospital in Wales in each year from 1988;

(2) what estimates he has of the cost to the national health service in Wales stemming from reported thefts from hospitals in each year from 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information is not available centrally in the form requested.

Child Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the training and enterprise councils in Wales taking part in the Government scheme to develop child care facilities for the over-fives.

Sir Wyn Roberts: 1993-94 is the first year in which the new out of school child care grant will be available. Welsh training and enterprise councils were consulted about how the initiative should be developed in the first year, and agreed that the work should be co-ordinated by the Chwarae Teg/Fair Play consortium with five TECs participating: Gwent, South Glamorgan, Mid Glamorgan, West Wales and Powys. The remaining TECs will be able to take part in 1994-95.

Traffic, Builth Wells

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column 117, what assessment he has made of the average time taken by a motorist to drive through Builth Wells in *(a)* February and *(b)* August.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Such assessments are made only in months little affected by seasonal traffic: April, May, June, September and October. The average journey times on the trunk roads between the limits of the proposed Builth Wells by pass were 181 seconds for the A470 and 340 seconds for the A483.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if an environmental impact study has been undertaken into the proposed Builth Wells bypass.

Sir Wyn Roberts: An environmental appraisal of viable routes for a possible bypass of Builth Wells has been undertaken.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer on 5 May, *Official Report*, column *117*, what is the average annual road accident figure; and how many road accidents took place in Builth Wells in 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The average annual number of accidents that occurred in Builth Wells over the last five years on the A470 and A483 trunk roads, within the limits of the proposed bypass, was eight. The provisional number for 1992, within the same limits, is nine.

A470

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on current plans for the improvement on the A470 between Betws-y-coed and Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The 1993 supplement to "Roads in Wales" shows improvements in the Lledr valley are programmed for the short and medium term. Work on the Minffordd to Cancoed section is currently expected to start before April 1996 and the remainder before March 1999, subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and the availability of funds.

Farmers and Fishermen

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many officials were employed by his Department to administer, inspect, regulate and advise the farming and fishing industries either directly, in agencies or on special contracts *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; how many people are involved in (i) farming and (ii) fishing, full or part time, in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on the numbers of staff in the Welsh Office and its agencies, and the number of people involved in farming and fishing in Wales is set out in the departmental report, Cm 2215, which is available in the Library of the House. Although it is not possible to isolate the staff resources denoted to the specific activities listed by my hon. Friend, the report does contain detailed information on the functions performed by the Department and the resources consumed. The most recent information on the numbers involved in farming is given in Welsh Office press notice published on 6 January 1993.

One-stop Shops

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 February, *Official Report*, column *363*, if he has yet received the report of his working party on one-stop shops; and if he will make it his policy to place a copy in the Library.

Mr. David Hunt: The working group will report to me shortly. I will announce my decisions in due course and place a copy in the Library of the House.

Dentists

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of dentists have withdrawn from the provision of NHS dental treatment for all except exempt categories since 1 April; what is the number of salaried dentists appointed by each family health service authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information is not available in the form requested. Returns provided by family health services authorities indicated that between 27 March and 7 May 1993, five dentists left authorities' dental lists as a direct result of the new fee scale introduced on 8 July 1992. Twelve dentists joined dental lists during the same period. This information was provided for managerial purposes and is not statistically validated.

Approval has been given for Dyfed and Gwynedd family health services authorities to employ a total of six whole-time equivalent salaried dentists. Both authorities are in the process of identifying suitable applicants and premises.

Withybush General Hospital

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will initiate an inquiry into the reasons why Withybush general hospital's roof needs substantial repair; who will supervise the repairs; what is the estimated cost of supervision; what will be the cost of the repair; who will pay for it; and which organisation supervised the construction of the new roof.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a contractual matter which is being pursued by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. The contractor has accepted responsibility for the remedial work to the roof and the authority is seeking to recover any indirect costs that may accrue in order that the work will be completed at no cost to the Pembrokeshire National Health Service Trust. Supervision of the remedial work remains the responsibility of the architects for the scheme.

Data Protetion

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has not been subject to any investigations by the Data Protection Registrar.

EC Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount of grants received from the European Community, by each local authority in Wales in 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: I will write to the hon. Gentleman and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 25 May 1993

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Racial Attacks

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases referred by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service during the last year, an element or allegation of racial motivation has been identified by the police; and how many of these cases were brought to court.

The Attorney-General: The code for crown prosecutors requires that racial motivation be regarded by crown prosecutors as an aggravating feature when considering in particular cases where the public interest requires a prosecution. Such motivation can be found in a wide range of offences. The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain records in a form which enables the information sought by the hon. Member to be obtained other than at disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Home Affairs Select Committee has published 30 reports since April 1989. The Government responses are contained in the following Command Papers, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Title of Home Affairs Select Committee Report	*Government reply*
Session 1988-89	
Second Report: The Financing of Channel 4	HC 434
Third Report: Higher Police Training and the Police Staff College	Cm 926
Fourth Report: Home Office Expenditure	Cm 838
Fifth Report: Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority for 1988	Cm 928
Sixth Report: Crack: the threat of hard drugs in the next decade (Interim report)	Cm 1164
Seventh Report: Drug Trafficking and Related Serious Crime	Cm 1164
First Special Report: Government Reply to the Second Report, Session 1988-89	n.a.
Session 1989-90	
First Report: Racial Attacks and Harassment	Cm 1058
Second Report: Compensating Victims Quickly: The Administration of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	Cm 1153
Third Report: Criminal Records	Cm 1163
Fourth Report: Crown Prosecution Service	Cm 1145
Fifth Report: Administrative Delays in the Immigration and Nationality Department	Cm 1368
Sixth Report: Form and Content of Home Office Annual Report	Cm 1381
Seventh Report: Practical Police Co-operation in the European Community	Cm 1367
Session 1990-91	
First Report: The Annual Report of the Data Protection Registrar	Cm 1485
Second Report: Policing Football Hooliganism	Cm 1539
Third Report: Next Steps Agencies	Cm 1549
Fourth Report: Levy on Horserace Betting	Cm 1583
Fifth Report: Police Sickness	Cm 1692
Sixth Report: Financing of Greyhound Racing	Cm 1757
Seventh Report: The Tote	Cm 1792
Eighth Report: Home Office Annual Report	Cm 1799
Session 1991-92	
First Report: Fire Safety and Policing of the Channel Tunnel	Cm 1853
Second Report: HM Chief Inspector of Fire's Annual Report	Cm 2005
Third Report: Electoral Counting Methods	Cm 2017
Fourth Report: Police Complaints Procedures	Cm 1996
Session 1992-93	
First Report: Accountability of the Security Service	Reply Pending
Second Report: Delays in the Immigration and Nationality Department	Cm 2185
Third Report: Domestic Violence	Reply Pending
Fourth Report: Immigration Advice Post-UKIAS	Letter 20 May 1993

Unit Fines

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment was made of the result of the pilot schemes for unit fines under the Criminal Justice Act 1991; and whether he will publish the results.

Mr. Jack: Such an assessment was made and published in Home Office Research paper 59: "Unit Fines: Experiments in Four Courts", a copy of which is in the Library.

Arrests (Soccer Matches)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were arrested at soccer matches in each season from 1989-90.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information for matches in England and Wales is contained in the following table:

	Arrests		
	1991-92	*1990-91*	*1989-90*
Football League	5,006	4,122	5,945
FA Cup	862	760	[1]—
Rumbelows Cup	439	512	[1]—
ZDS Cup	109	60	[1]—
Auto Glass Cup	71	135	[1]—
Total	6,487	5,589	[1]—

[1] Information not available.
Information on the 1992-93 season is not yet available.

Fire Brigades

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet leaders of the Fire Brigades Union to discuss wage negotiating procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the Fire Brigades Union, at their request, on 17 March to discuss the Government's policy on public sector pay this year. The negotiation of firefighters' pay is not a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend. Firefighters' pay and conditions of service are matters for the local authorities which employ firefighters, and are negotiated in the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps will be taken to discourage the recruitment of Home Office personnel by firms tendering for Home Office businesses.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend would not wish to discourage such moves provided there is no impropriety involved.

Police and Fire Services

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount of expenditure on *(a)* police, *(b)* fire and *(c)* other services within the responsibility of his Department in (i) England, (ii) Greater London and (iii) the south-east, excluding Greater London, for each year since 1982-83, including estimates for 1992-93, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure, excluding local authority credit approvals/capital allocations.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Details of expenditure on these services from 1984-85 to 1992-93 are given in the table. Information in respect of the first two years is not readily available. The figures given for capital represent total expenditure; authorities have to decide the sources of finance only in aggregate. So it is not possible to identify the use of credit approvals for particular services.

£ million

	1984-85 Outturn	*1985-86 Outturn*	*1986-87 Outturn*	*1987-88 Outturn*	*1988-89 Outturn*	*1989-90 Outturn*	*1990-91 Outturn*	*1991-92 Outturn*	*1992-93 Estimate*
England									
Police									
Current	2,645·5	2,586·0	2,814·0	3,074·9	3,415·5	3,867·5	4,326·7	4,828·3	5,230·9
Capital	89·0	96·4	101·9	125·3	149·3	218·3	166·1	200·1	204·8
Fire									
Current	566·8	611·5	653·0	718·1	769·8	867·6	960·2	1,053·6	1,126·7
Capital	34·0	31·3	27·0	53·9	55·6	70·1	48·2	50·8	59·5
Other Services[1]									
Current	205·5	221·4	241·2	262·8	304·5	343·4	384·8	433·5	469·1
Capital	4·3	4·8	10·6	10·7	14·0	14·9	14·6	16·7	17·2
South East England[2] (excluding Greater London)									
Police									
Current	406·2	418·0	463·9	509·2	567·8	628·1	707·6	790·4	863·3
Capital	9·7	17·9	15·6	19·1	28·0	42·6	22·0	27·2	27·8
Fire									
Current	102·5	109·4	118·2	128·9	142·5	162·2	180·4	198·8	212·6
Capital	8·0	8·0	6·6	13·3	13·3	14·1	8·2	8·5	9·9
Other Services[1]									
Current	34·6	40·3	40·5	45·3	50·4	56·4	33·3	74·1	84·9
Capital	0·8	1·0	1·5	2·5	5·4	8·2	7·8	7·8	8·0
Greater London									
Police[3]									
Current	717·1	733·2	817·9	878·9	960·8	1,085·0	1,241·3	1,384·4	1,496·3
Capital	32·2	37·1	38·5	41·7	44·8	47·6	58·0	68·1	69·7
Fire									
Current	126·9	143·0	145·6	160·8	171·4	194·8	206·2	219·5	234·7
Capital	6·6	2·6	3·5	8·5	7·9	16·0	13·7	9·6	11·2
Other Services[1]									
Current	36·7	39·6	48·5	48·9	51·5	58·5	71·6	81·2	86·6
Capital	0·2	0·1	1·2	1·7	1·0	1·1	1·1	1·4	1·2

[1]Probation, emergency planning, other courts, registration of electors and school crossing patrols.
[2]Taken as comprising Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex.
[3]Expenditure on the Metropolitan Police: the Metropolitan Police District includes parts of Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey.

Fire Service, Marchington

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who maintains the vehicles of the emergency fire service based at Marchington near Uttoxeter, Staffordshire; when any such contract was granted; and when it is due to expire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A contract with TNT Express (UK) Ltd. to store and maintain the emergency fire service stockpile for a period of five years commenced on 1 July 1991. The Home Office has an option to extend the period of the contract to a maximum of 10 years.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the establishments providing secure accommodation for juvenile offenders that he has visited since taking his present office.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend visited Feltham young offenders institution on 25 September 1992 and has plans to visit a secure intensive support unit run by a local authority social services department next month. On his behalf, and since the beginning of this year, I have myself visited secure facilities at Orchard lodge in Southwark, the St. Charles centre in Essex, the Nightingale unit at Feltham young offenders institution and Lisnevin training school in Northern Ireland.

Drugs

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received the research report from Sheffield university, prepared for his Department, on the prevalence of drug use among young people.

Mr. Jack: The research report from Sheffield university was received in draft form in January. It is being prepared for publication later this year.

South Manchester College

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implications for his Department of the judgment in the case of Kenny and Woodroffe *v.* South Manchester college.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On 24 March 1993, Sir Michael Ogden held in the case of Kenny and Woodroffe *v.* South Manchester college that the European Community acquired rights directive applied to the transfer from one undertaking to another of education provision at Thorn Cross young offender institution.

The Prison Service has a clear, significant and legitimate interest in the judgment. Counsel was instructed by the Treasury Solicitor to attend the hearing and to maintain a watching brief for the Prison Service. If the judgment is upheld on appeal, it will affect the amount of public money which the Prison Service will need to pay contractors for the future provision of education services in prison establishments. A protective notice of appeal has now been lodged by South Manchester college. The Prison Service is meeting the college's legal costs in relation to the appeal.

A note will be added in due course to the 1993-94 appropriation account in accordance with the principles set out in "Government Accounting", section 12.6.12.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the Metropolitan police have been subject to an investigation by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint; when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by the police to ensure future compliance with the principle.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The Data Protection Registrar has recorded eight complaints against the Metropolitan police. They are as follows:

(1) 6 April 1987
Alleged contravention of Principle 5:
Personal data shall be accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date.
(2) 18 January 1988
Alleged contravention of Principle 3:
Personal data held for any purpose or purposes shall not be used or disclosed in a manner incompatible with the purpose.
(3) 8 January 1988
(4) 8 January 1992
(5) 19 October 1992
Alleged contravention of Principle 7:
An individual shall be entitled *(a)* at reasonable intervals and without undue delay or expense —(i) to be informed by any data user whether he holds personal data of which that individual is the subject; and (ii) to access to any such data held by a user; and *(b)* where appropriate, to have such data corrected or erased.
(6) 13 May 1991
Alleged cases of unauthorised disclosure
(7) 4 August 1992
(8) 27 February 1991
Alleged breach of Section 5(2)

In no case has the registrar considered it necessary to serve an enforcement notice on the commissioner. The commissioner keeps compliance with the law under review and ensures that policy, practice and training reflect statutory requirements.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Stratford-on-Avon

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what information he has on *(a)* how many people visit Stratford-on-Avon every year and *(b)* what proportion of those visitors attend performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Mr. Key: According to the leisure day visits survey, there were 4 million day visits by United Kingdom residents to Stratford-on-Avon in 1988-89. It is not known how many United Kingdom residents stayed overnight in Stratford-on-Avon, but according to the 1991 United Kingdom tourism survey, there were 800,000 trips to Warwickshire involving an overnight stay.

In addition, according to the international passenger survey, there were 133,000 visits of one night or more by overseas residents to Stratford-on-Avon in 1991. It is not known how many overseas residents visited Stratford while staying elsewhere.

The sources for the foregoing data do not identify what proportion of visits involved attendance at a performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company, but the latest available data show that in 1991-92 553,000 tickets were sold at the Royal Shakespeare Company's three theatres in Stratford-on-Avon.

Digital Television Technology

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has had with the television industry on the development of a strategy for the introduction of digital television technology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: None, but preliminary discussions are taking place with officials, both in my Department and the Department of Trade and Industry.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consideration he is giving to increasing the purchase grants of the national museums and galleries and the National Heritage Memorial Fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: We review all public expenditure programmes each year in the light of what we can afford. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce the results in the autumn Budget.

Royal Parks

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many nurseries are currently being operated for the royal parks; and what was the position three years ago;

(2) for how long the nursery at Greenwich park has been disused; and what are his proposals for the area of the park formerly occupied by the nursery;

(3) if he will estimate the proportion of plants for use in the royal parks which are currently being imported from overseas suppliers; and what was the comparable figure three years ago;

(4) if he will provide an estimate of the amount of time being allocated by the contractor in each of the royal parks to the supervision of apprentices; and what were the figures three years ago.

Mr. Key: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its chief executive, Mr. David Welch. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from David Welch to Mr. Nick Raynsford, dated 24 May 1993

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for National Heritage has asked me to reply to your Written Parliamentary Questions asking:

> (i) how many nurseries are currently being operated for the Royal Parks; and what was the position three years ago;
>
> (ii) for how long the nursery at Greenwich Park has been disused; and what are his proposals for the area of the park formerly occupied by the nursery;
>
> (iii) if he will estimate the proportion of plants for use in the Royal Parks which are currently being imported from overseas suppliers; and what was the comparable figure three years ago; and
>
> (iv) if he will provide an estimate of the amount of time being allocated by the contractor in each of the Royal Parks to the supervision of apprentices; and what were the figures three years ago.

Three years ago there were nurseries in Hyde, Regent's, Greenwich and Richmond Parks. Following the contracting out of the Royal Parks nursery production work in 1992 only the Hyde Park nursery remains in use by the contractors who also make use of their own premises.

The Greenwich Park nursery was de-commissioned in June 1992 and I am currently considering a proposal by our landscape architects to combine the site with the deer enclosure, to create an historic animal enclosure. In the short term, we are looking at the possible use of part of the nursery area by a local charity dealing with the rehabilitation of disabled people.

Less than 2 per cent. of all plants supplied to the Royal Parks each year are imported. Imports represent a very small proportion of the cuttings propagated by our nursery contractor. Before June 1992, all plants were propagated within the Royal Parks.

Under the terms of the nursery and grounds maintenance contracts all apprentices are required to be supervised by a member of the contractors' own staff. Before 1992 apprentices were directly employed by the Department and supervised by Royal Parks staff. Information is not available on the time allocated. We have employed the former Director of Studies at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, to advise us on apprentice training. He will be speaking to each apprentice to ensure that the training they receive is appropriate and suitable. In addition we are talking to the Royal Horticultural society to negotiate some practical training at their gardens in Wisley.

As a former apprentice myself, I am very keen that our scheme should be managed in the best tradition.

Television Reception

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage of the land area of England is not served by broadcasts by *(a)* independent television and *(b)* BBC television.

Mr. Brooke: Broadcasters determine transmitter coverage to serve resident populations rather than areas of land. About 99·4 per cent. of the United Kingdom population is able to receive both BBC and independent television services.

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what offers in lieu of tax have been accepted or allocated since his announcement of 23 April, *Official Report*, column *227*.

Mr. Brooke: Since my last announcement on 23 April, *Official Report*, column *227*, I am pleased to inform the House of the acceptance of two surrealist hats by Eileen Agar in lieu of taxation, which will satisfy £3,500 tax. I am also pleased to announce the allocation of an offer comprising a collection of silver and nine sporting paintings. The collection of silver will go to the Victoria and Albert museum, except for two candlesticks which will be allocated to the Museum of London. The sporting paintings will be allocated to the British Sporting Art trust, for display at the National Horseracing museum, Newmarket, except for one painting, "Sittingbourne with S. Rogers 2nd, West Australian with F. Butler winner of the Derby 1853" by Henry Alken, which will go to the Doncaster museum. The surrealist hats will go to the Victoria and Albert museum in accordance with the condition on which the offer was made.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the breakdown of departmental expenditure between the occupied royal palaces in the latest available year.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The figures for property services in 1992-93 are as follows:

	£ million
Buckingham Palace	3·138
Windsor Castle	9·698
St. James's Palace and Clarence House	1·650
Kensington Palace	0·513
Utilities, wages and other costs not broken down by palace	8·137

	£ million
Total	23·136

The figures for Windsor castle includes the costs of a major refurbishment programme and of initial clearance and stabilisation work in the fire damaged area.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

South Africa

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the ODA budget for the Republic of South Africa in the current financial year; and what proportion he plans to disburse on higher education.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We spent over £10 million on development assistance for black South Africans in 1992-93, and aim to increase spending in 1993-94. About 64 per cent. of 1992-93 expenditure was on higher education, including training awards in a variety of different sectors.

TRANSPORT

A550

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the photographs accompanying the publication of formal proposals for phases 1 and 2 of the A550 improvements was taken.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Friday 24 August 1990.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify traffic on *(a)* the A550 during the recent signposted diversion during roadworks at Queensferry and *(b)* for the same area prior to the diversion.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Average daily traffic flows:

(i) During recent diversion—
Hooton—11,000 vehicles per day
Deeside Park—35,000 vehicles per day

(ii) Prior to diversion—
Hooton—11,300 vehicles per day
Deeside Park—39,500 vehicles per day

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement detailing the conclusions drawn after the public consultation exercise into phase 3 of proposals for improvements to the A550.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: That there was substantial support for major improvements to the A550 and for the adoption of the blue route. That, after considering carefully the question of alternatives via the M53 and M56, the best option was to proceed with the modified blue route.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what factors were considered when the decision was taken to develop the A550.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The objectives underlying all trunk road schemes are:

To assist economic growth by reducing transport costs
To improve the environment by removing through traffic from unsuitable roads in towns and villages, and
To enhance road safety.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration was given to traffic-calming measures as a solution to current problems on the A550; and if he will make a statement on the investigation and its conclusions.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The A550 forms an integral part of the trunk road system which we wish to maintain and develop. Traffic calming is not relevant in these circumstances.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify annual accidents *(a)* on the A550 Ledsham bridge section prior to the improvements made in the 1980s and *(b)* for the same route since the improvements were completed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There were nine accidents in four years prior to the improvements completed in early 1989. There have been three accidents in four years since then.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the terms of reference for improving the A550 will include an examination of the justification of the principle of the entire scheme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Each stage of the improvement stands alone as a separate scheme, the need and justification for which is likely to be tested at public inquiry.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the original proposals for the A550 improvement were received; and whether they formed a co-ordinated scheme with proposals for the Dee barrage.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The 1987 White Paper "Policy for Roads" introduced a scheme to improve the A550 between Woodbank and Ledsham. In 1989, the complementary scheme for the improvement between Ledsham and the M53 was added. Account was taken of all planned road schemes in the area.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the principle of the current scheme for major improvements to the A550 was last evaluated; and if he will make a statement detailing the alternative schemes with which it was compared at that time.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The justification for a scheme is continually assessed as design progresses. Alternative schemes assessed were an on-line improvement and an off-line route to the east of Two Mills.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the possible rail alternatives to the current proposals for improvements to the A550 were last evaluated.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Recent and planned improvements to the rail network in the area are being taken into account in the scheme assessment. They are unlikely to have a major impact on the need for the improvements to the A550.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the criteria used to reach the decision for the proposed Ledsham to Deeside Park and M53 to Ledsham phases of the A550 improvements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The A550 is a key element in the trunk road network for journeys between the Merseyside conurbation and north Wales. The present narrow single carriageway has a poor vertical alignment in places and is substandard for the amount of traffic using it. Poor visibility at junctions and accesses makes conditions hazardous for all road users and accidents are above the national average. Traffic is subject to congestion and queuing at peak hours and summer weekends. The degree and frequency of the congestion will increase with forecast higher flows.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will quantify traffic annually using *(a)* the A550 prior to the M53/A55 link around Chester into north Wales and *(b)* the same route since completion of the M53/A55 link.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The following is the information:

(a) Prior to completion of M53/A55 link—
Hooton—12,450 vehicles per day
Deeside Park—46,500 vehicles per day
(b) Since completion of M53/A55 link—
Hooton—12,450 vehicles per day
Deeside Park—45,500 vehicles per day

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement detailing the forecast traffic growth on the A550; and what are the criteria on which this forecast is based.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Traffic flow forecasts for 2011 are:

	Vehicles per day
Hooton	
Low growth	30,500
High growth	37,500
Deeside Park	
Low growth	71,700
High growth	87,500

The Department used its standard methodologies to produce growth factors for private vehicles which reflect local circumstances. For commercial vehicles growth was assumed to be in line with national road traffic forecasts.

The growth factors were then applied to current traffic flows to produce forecasts for the year 2011 which were assigned to the road network containing the Department's proposals.

Bypass Definition

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what definition of a highway bypass is used by his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There is no statutory definition of a bypass. Trunk road bypass schemes remove through traffic from towns and villages on all-purpose trunk roads. Other schemes in the national road programme may have a similar effect.

Lorry Drivers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for dealing with abuse of the requirements on lorry drivers' hours and rest periods, and the use of tachographs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Breaches of the rules for drivers' hours, rest periods and the proper fitting and use of tachographs have serious implications for road safety. We take a grave view of those who seek to circumvent these rules and in the interests of safety the vehicle inspectorate is to increase the enforcement resources it devotes to this work by nearly 70 per cent. from June this year. This will be organised through special task forces to target specific areas of concern. We aim to achieve this result within the present resources of the vehicle inspectorate both through a number of efficiency gains and by switching some effort from weight enforcement.

Motorways

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish a Green Paper on motorway charging.

Mr. MacGregor: Together with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, I intend to publish tomorrow a Green Paper on the basis of charging for motorways in Great Britain entitled "Paying for Better Motorways: Issues for Discussion". Copies will be available in the Vote Office from 11 am in the usual way.

The Green Paper will be very much a consultation document to stimulate informed and vigorous debate. The Government have taken no decision to introduce direct charging.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House Committees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission if he will make a statement outlining the relationship between the Commission and the domestic House Committees, indicating how their reports are considered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Beith: Under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978, the Commission is responsible for the appointment of staff of the House and for laying before the House the Estimates for House of Commons: Administration and House of Commons: Works Services. The work of the Commission in carrying out its responsibilities is described in its annual reports presented to the House, most recently on 16 July 1992 (HC 155).

The Finance and Services Committee has responsibility for detailed consideration of financial matters, including questions of priority for expenditure. It prepares draft estimates with the assistance of the board of management for submission to the Commission. The main role of the domestic committees, apart from their consumer role in advising on the delivery of services by House Departments, is to make policy recommendations to the Speaker and the Commission as appropriate. The recommendations are then considered as necessary by the Finance and Services Committee in advance of final decisions being taken by the Commission.

The Commission operates a long-standing policy of requiring the introduction of a major new service to be approved by the House before provision is made for it in the estimates. The occasion for such a debate would normally be the consideration of a report from the relevant domestic committee.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Preferential Assistance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish figures showing Government expenditure on regional preferential assistance to industry for each standard United Kingdom region *(a)* at current prices and *(b)* at 1989-90 prices for the years 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Sainsbury: Details of regional preferential assistance at current prices for 1991-92 and 1992-93 can be found in my answer to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 18 May, *Official Report*, columns *121-22*.

A regional breakdown of regional preferential assistance at 1989-90 prices, covering the period 1991-92 and 1992-93, is as follows:

£ million

Region	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Northern[1]	55·3	40·5
Yorkshire and Humberside	15·8	11·5
East Midlands	2·3	1·0
South West	7·2	6·9
West Midlands	7·5	9·1
North West[2]	42·9	30·9
England	131·0	99·8
Wales	133·5	[3]118·2
Scotland	111·8	[3]86·7
Great Britain	376·3	[3]304·8
Northern Ireland	121·8	[3]91·0
United Kingdom	498·1	[3]395·8

All figures are gross and include payments to Nationalised Industries.

[1] Includes expenditure in Cumbria.

[2] Excludes expenditure in Cumbria.

[3] Provisional.

The items included in the expenditure are regional development grants, regional selective assistance and regional enterprise grants; expenditure on land and factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation, the Scottish and Welsh development agencies, the Development Board for Rural Wales and the Highlands and Islands development board.

Northern Ireland has a different range of financial incentives available and the items included are Industrial Development Board grants and loans, expenditure on land and factories, share capital standard capital grants and local enterprise development unit grants and loans.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the numbers and value of offers of *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* regional enterprise grants within each standard United Kingdom region in 1991-92 and 1992-93; what is the forecast outturn for 1993-94; and if he will list (i) the number of applications, (ii) the associated project costs and (iii) the amount of grant paid.

Mr. Sainsbury: The regional selective assistance (RSA) and regional enterprise grants (REG) schemes are applicable only in Great Britain.

For 1991-92 all the information requested about RSA and REG can be found in the annual report of the Industrial Development Act 1982 at appendices 7 and 5 respectively. Copies are available in the Library of the House. Apart from the amount of grant paid, information for 1992-93 is presently being prepared and will be published in the annual report in September 1993.

The amount of grant paid in each standard region in 1992-93 was:

£ million

	1992-93	
	RSA	*REG*
Northern	28·1	1·5
North West	18·2	1·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	8·4	1·8
South West	5·1	0·8
East Midlands	0·6	0·3
West Midlands	10·7	0·1
England	71·1	5·8
Scotland	59·2	2·8
Wales	[1]58·8	[1]1·1
Great Britain	[1]189·1	[1]9·7

[1] Provisional.

The latest forecast outturns for RSA and REG for 1993-94 are contained in the 1993-94 Supply estimates.

Sellafield

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the current timing of the decision in respect of the commissioning of the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield.

Mr. Eggar: Before commissioning its thermal oxide reprocessing plant, British Nuclear Fuels plc will need such consents and authorisations as may be required by law. The company's application for revised discharge authorisations for the Sellafield site is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Ainger: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the revised timetable for the long-term safety review of nuclear reactors by the nuclear installations inspectorate.

Mr. Eggar: The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has so far published reports of its findings on six power stations. It intends to publish a report on the generic issues arising out of the long-term safety reviews (LTSRs) of Magnox stations later this year. Important modifications to plant at all the Magnox stations have been or are being implemented. The NII has requested the licensees to give priority to these generic safety concerns so that action is taken without waiting for completion of individual station's LTSRs. Brief reports on the remaining five stations should then be available before the end of 1994.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he received the 1991-92 report of his advisory committee on the safety of nuclear installations; and what action he plans to take in response to its recommendations;

(2) when he received a copy of the third report of the advisory committee on the safety of nuclear installations study group on human factors.

Mr. Eggar: I received copies of the biennial report of the Health and Safety Commission's Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations (ACSNI), and of a report from its study group on human factors, on Monday 17 May, the day of their publication. The biennial report contains no recommendations as such, but I have noted the areas of work which ACSNI has undertaken in 1991-1992 and have also been informed about the committee's forward programme for 1993.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to seek an international convention to harmonise the safety standards of nuclear reactors.

Mr. Eggar: The Government welcome the discussions taking place at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna on a proposed international nuclear safety convention, and hopes these can be concluded as soon as possible. The convention should be based on general principles of nuclear safety and should be aimed at improving the safety of civil nuclear power reactors world wide.

Mr. Bowden: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to increase the resources of the International Atomic Energy Agency for the implementation of programmes for improving safety in the nuclear industries of the countries of central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Eggar: Major funding for projects to improve nuclear safety in the countries of central and eastern Europe is being provided through bilateral assistance programmes co-ordinated by G24, and through the multilateral fund, established as an initiative of the G7 July 1992 Munich summit. The Government are playing a full part in these programmes and recently made a contribution of £8·25 million to the fund. The Government consider that the resources currently available to the International Atomic Energy Agency are broadly consistent with the distinctive contribution the agency is able to make in the area, both through its own specific programmes and the quality of its technical advice to others.

Plutonium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many shipments of safeguarded plutonium from the United Kingdom to Japan have taken place to date.

Mr. Eggar: For the period from May 1979, shipments of plutonium from the United Kingdom to Japan were made in financial years 1979-80, 1980-81 and 1981-82. The shipments were made under safeguards for use in civil nuclear power research and development. The specific details are a matter for the operator concerned and its customers.

Abu Dhabi

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what matters in regard to the prospects for a carbon tax were raised by the Minister for Energy during his recent visit to Abu Dhabi.

Mr. Eggar: During my recent visit to the Gulf, considerable concern was expressed in Abu Dhabi and elsewhere about the European Commission's proposals for a carbon/energy tax. I explained that the United Kingdom was not convinced that a Community-wide tax along the lines proposed by the Commission was either a necessary or appropriate response to the problem of global warming. I also took the opportunity to explain the outcome of the joint session of the Energy and Environment Councils on 23 April outlined in my reply to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham), *Official Report*, columns *109-10*, on 5 May 1993.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade to what extent British Coal may take into account commercial concerns over potential competitors in assessing disposal and future sale of pits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Offering to the private sector pits which British Coal does not wish to keep in production is a matter for British Coal. As the White Paper explains, the Government believe that it is right that where a private sector operator is prepared to take on a pit for the long term that operator should have the opportunity to succeed or fail in the market. In considering bids, British Coal will, of course, have to have due regard to its statutory duties.

Newly licensed mines will have to find new outlets for their production and will not have access to British Coal's contracts with the electricity supply industry.

Croatia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what advice his Department gives to British businesses considering investment in the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Needham: Because of Croatia's serious economic and political difficulties, my Department urges a cautious approach on British companies considering investing there.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the increase in import penetration of manufactured goods each year since 1972, distinguishing between imports from *(a)* the EEC and *(b)* the rest of the world.

Mr. Needham: Information on import penetration from 1970 to 1979 was published in the June 1980 edition of "Economic Trends". Subsequent data up to the year ended June 1989 were published in "Business Monitor MQ12"; annual summaries are published in table 12.2 of the "Annual Abstract of Statistics". These publications are available in the Library of the House. The figures do not separate the EC from the rest of the world.

Tariffs

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a table showing the average incidence of tariffs on imports and exports of manufactures in *(a)* 1972 and *(b)* 1992 in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) the original EEC Six, and indicating the

average loss of tariff preference between the United Kingdom and *(x)* Denmark, *(y)* the Irish Republic and *(z)* Commonwealth countries since 1972.

Mr. Needham: No. The provision of this detailed information would incur disproportionate costs in terms of resources and time.

Coal Review

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to visit representatives of *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees of those coal mines in Wales which were included in the British Coal review to discuss the future of their pits.

Mr. Eggar: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans to do so at present.

Gas Interconnector

Mr. Stephen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made by the group of companies studying the feasibility of building a gas interconnector between the United Kingdom and the continent.

Mr. Eggar: I understand that the group will shortly be inviting potential users to participate in an interconnector linking the United Kingdom and Belgian gas grids. I welcome this initiative by the industry. It is an important step towards realising the gas trade opportunities this link will provide. It will be for the Government to negotiate with the Belgian Government the necessary treaty for a pipeline crossing our continental shelf boundary, and I am writing to the chairman of the group to assure him of our readiness to do so.

Companies House

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set Companies House executive agency for 1993-94.

Mr. Heseltine: I have set Companies House executive agency the following targets for 1993-94:

- to make all statutory documents available for public inspection within five working days of receipt;
- to satisfy all requests for searches within two hours;
- to achieve a compliance rate of 86 per cent. by end June 1993, increasing to 90 per cent. by end June 1994 for companies filing accounts and annual returns; and
- to reduce real unit costs by an average of 2 per cent. a year.

Companies House is also required to achieve a 6 per cent. average annual rate of return based on its operating surplus expressed as a percentage of average net assets employed at current values.

In addition, I have set the chief executive of the agency the target of replying within 10 working days to letters from MPs delegated to him for reply.

Telecommunications Council

Mrs. Angela Knight: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Telecommunications Council held on 10 May.

Mr. Leigh: The main item of business was the proposal for a Council decision on an action plan for the introduction of advanced television services in Europe. Some progress was made towards achieving an agreement, but several key points on the content of the action plan, including the overall amount of any Community expenditure have yet to be agreed. Negotiations will continue at a further Council meeting, scheduled for 16 June.

A common position was agreed in principle on the directive applying open network provision to voice telephony. Council conclusions on the Commission's communication on the European telecommunications equipment industry were adopted without discussion. These invite the Commission to strengthen Community action already under way in four areas: establishment of an internal market, support for research and development, development of the terminal equipment market, and improving competitive conditions in the world market. There was also a short debate on a recent Commission communication on the review of the telecommunications services market, which proposed full liberalisation of telecom services by 1998. On the postal Green Paper the Commission gave a brief oral report on the results of the consultation period. There will be more substantive discussions on both these points at the Telecommunications Council on 16 June.

UKAEA

Mr. Dunn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will make a statement on the chairmanship of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Heseltine: The current chairman's appointment expires on 30 June 1993. I have appointed Sir Anthony Cleaver to succeed him, initially for three years, from 1 July 1993.

Advertisements (Germany)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many advertisements his Department has placed in German newspapers and periodicals; into which ones they were placed; what the cost has been; what was the purpose of the advertisements; what the response has been; and if he will place copies of these advertisements in the Library.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* During the 1992-93 financial year a total of 74 advertisements costing some £160,000 were placed in *Handelsblatt*, *Wirtschaftswoche* and *TopBusiness*, together with chamber of commerce magazines in Freiburg, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Karlsruhe and Reutlingen. The advertising campaign was aimed at stimulating the interest of German companies in the advantages the United Kingdom offers as a profitable investment location. So far, some 40 companies have responded. Copies of the advertisement have been placed in the Library.

Gas Prices

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the standing charges per quarter and the unit charge in pence/kWh for gas prices for each year since 1991-92; what is each figure as a percentage increase or decrease on the previous year's figure; what were the changes in the retail prices index over the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The information requested is as follows:

Domestic Gas: Standard Credit Tariff

	Standing charge Pence per day	Unit cost Pence per kWh
1 April 1991	10·3	1·566
1 April 1992	10·3	1·566
1 July 1992	10·3	1·507
1 October 1992	10·1	1·477
1 April 1993	10·1	1·477

Percentage changes

	Gas		
	Standing charge	Unit cost	RPI (all items)
April 1991 to April 1992	nil	nil	+4·3
April 1992 to April 1993	−1·9	−5·7	+1·3

Retail Prices Index (all items)
13 January 1987 = 100

	RPI
April 1991	133·1
April 1992	138·8
April 1993	140·6

Over the two-year period 1990-92 in real terms standing charges have decreased by 8·2 per cent. and unit cost by 4·1 per cent.

EDUCATION

Discretionary Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many representations he has received on the subject of discretionary grants over the past 18 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received a considerable number of representations on this subject from members of the public, interested groups and hon. Members.

Testing

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations he has had from, and what meetings he has had with, parent-teacher associations on the subject of testing in schools; and what consideration he is giving to their views.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received a number of letters from parent-teacher associations in recent months. He last met the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations (NCPTA) on 26 April. He has also met a delegation from Parents' Initiative, and gave a speech at the annual conference of the Campaign for Real Education on 17 April.

All these occasions allowed my right hon. Friend to speak to parents, and to seek their views on the subject of testing. We recognise that parents have an essential role to play in the education process: we want actively to engage them in it.

My right hon. Friend has asked Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman designate of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, to conduct a wide-ranging review of the manageability of the national curriculum and the associated testing and assessment framework. Parent-teacher associations should make their views known to him.

Student Loans

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of students have taken up a student loan within the first year of study, in each year since the initiation of the student loan scheme.

Mr. Boswell: This is a matter for the Student Loans Company. I will ask the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Multiple Disabilities

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will introduce legislation to extend the statutory entitlement to education for people with multiple disabilities to at least the age of 25 years; and if he will meet the campaign for people with multiple disabilities to discuss the need for statutory change.

Mr. Boswell: The Further Education Act 1992 requires the Further Education Funding Council and local education authorities to ensure that adequate further education provision is available for adults without age limit, including those with multiple disabilities. These are substantial statutory duties; the Government have no plans to extend them.

Teacher Education

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what advice he has received from the Office for Standards in Education on the experience of partnership between higher education institutions and schools in the education and training of teachers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what advice he has received from the Office for Standards in Education arising from its surveys of teachers education courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: Ofsted is engaged in a four year cycle of inspections of higher education institutions offering initial teacher training and it or the institutions publish these reports. From time to time, Ofsted also publish reports on surveys conducted on various aspects of initial or in-service training for teachers.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how his plans for the future of teacher education differ from the statement in circular 9/92 concerning the shared responsibility of higher education institutions and schools for planning and management of courses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: I welcome the move towards greater partnership between higher education institutions and schools which circular 9/92 has brought about, and look forward to similar developments in primary teacher training. I am also pleased that we are now able to offer some schools the chance to design and run their own courses, allowing them to decide on an appropriate role

for higher education institutions. I shall be announcing the names of the first schools chosen to run such courses shortly.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he will publish a circular about the future of teacher education for primary school teachers; what advice he has received from the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education on this matter this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Patten: Proposals for the reform of primary initial teacher training will be announced soon and will take account of advice received from the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how he intends to alter the present arrangements for teacher education; on what basis qualifications will be awarded to students; who will validate such qualifications; and if he will make it his policy that those qualifications will be no lower in quality and status than existing teacher qualifications.

Mr. Boswell: The Government have already introduced new requirements for secondary teacher training. My right hon. Friend recently announced a pioneer scheme for school-led training courses. We will shortly be issuing for consultation proposals for the reform of primary teacher training. Arrangements for validation are for the institutions concerned; my right hon. Friend will continue to use his powers to approve courses leading to qualified teacher status so as to improve the quality and standing of the teaching profession.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the current arrangements for teacher education; which types of qualification are available to those who wish to practise as teachers; who validates such qualifications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Current arrangements for initial teacher training, and other ways of achieving qualified teacher status, are summarised in the publication "Routes into Teaching" issued by the Teaching as a Career unit. Copies are available from the Library.

Head Teachers and Deputies

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a table showing the earnings of head teachers and deputy head teachers in each group from one to six in real terms at January 1993 prices for each year since 1990-91; and if he will provide estimates for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Boswell: The current pay spine for heads and deputies was introduced on 1 January 1991. Table A shows the values of the points on the spine at that date and on subsequent dates when they have been increased, converted to January 1993 prices by use of the retail prices index. The spine was extended by two points in April 1991.

Table B shows the points ranges applying to the salaries of heads and deputies in the six school groups. The School Teachers' Review Body has not yet been asked to report on teachers' pay in 1994-95.

Table A
Movements in values of heads and deputies' pay spine

Point	1 January 1991	1 April 1991	1 December 1991	1 April 1992	1 April 1993
1	19,391	20,387	20,965	22,046	21,981
2	19,708	20,720	21,309	22,407	22,340
3	20,026	21,056	21,654	22,770	22,702
4	20,344	21,388	21,995	23,128	23,061
5	20,662	21,724	22,339	23,492	23,423
6	20,980	22,057	22,684	23,853	23,782
7	21,298	22,392	23,028	24,217	24,144
8	21,616	22,725	23,370	24,574	24,500
9	21,934	23,061	23,714	24,938	24,865
10	22,251	23,393	24,059	25,299	25,224
11	22,569	23,729	24,403	25,660	25,583
12	22,887	24,062	24,744	26,020	25,943
13	23,205	24,397	25,089	26,381	26,302
14	23,523	24,730	25,433	26,745	26,667
15	23,841	25,066	25,778	27,106	27,026
16	24,159	25,398	26,119	27,466	27,385
17	24,477	25,734	26,463	27,827	27,744
18	24,794	26,067	26,808	28,191	28,109
19	25,112	26,403	27,152	28,552	28,468
20	25,430	26,735	27,493	28,913	28,827
21	25,856	27,183	27,954	29,396	29,310
22	26,279	27,627	28,411	29,876	29,787
23	26,702	28,072	28,868	30,356	30,266
24	27,128	28,520	29,329	30,842	30,749
25	27,550	28,964	29,786	31,322	31,229
26	27,973	29,409	30,243	31,802	31,709
27	28,399	29,856	30,703	32,285	32,188
28	28,822	30,301	31,161	32,768	32,671
29	29,245	30,745	31,618	33,248	33,151
30	29,776	31,305	32,194	33,853	33,754
31	30,306	31,861	32,767	34,455	34,355
32	30,834	32,418	33,337	35,055	34,952
33	31,365	32,974	33,910	35,657	35,553
34	31,896	33,534	34,486	36,265	36,159
35	32,424	34,090	35,056	36,864	36,756
36	32,954	34,647	35,629	37,467	37,357
37	33,485	35,203	36,202	38,069	37,957
38	34,226	35,984	37,004	38,913	38,799
39	34,967	36,764	37,805	39,754	39,635
40	35,710	37,544	38,610	40,600	40,480
41	36,451	38,321	39,409	41,441	41,318
42	37,192	39,102	40,210	42,282	42,157
43	37,936	39,882	41,015	43,129	43,002
44	38,676	40,662	41,817	43,973	43,841
45	39,417	41,443	42,615	44,813	44,680
46	40,161	42,223	43,420	45,657	45,522
47	40,901	43,000	44,222	46,501	46,363
48	41,642	43,780	45,023	47,345	47,205
49	42,386	44,561	45,825	48,189	48,047
50	—	45,341	46,627	49,029	48,883
51	—	46,118	47,428	49,873	49,725

Table B
Heads' and deputies' pay ranges

School Group	Head teachers Spine Point	Deputy head teachers Spine Point
1	3-15	1-8
2	8-22	2-10
3	15-29	4-13
4	23-37	8-20
5	31-44	15-26
6	38-51	22-34

Key Stage Tests

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what arrangements have been made to produce the large print version of the key stage tests.

Mr. Forth: Brailled, enlarged and modified print versions of test papers for 14-year-olds are available for pupils with a statement of special needs for visual impairment. It is for teachers to decide which type of question paper is most suitable for their pupils. The School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) asked schools to place orders for such papers by January 1993. Pupil packs are made up individually according to schools' orders.

Large print versions of the tests for seven-year-olds have not been prepared. Given the way the tests are administered, teachers are able to explain the nature of the tasks to pupils with visual impairment. However, schools may enlarge pupil work sheets in preparing the tests for pupils with special needs.

SEAC has also advised schools of a telephone helpline which has been established at the Royal National Institute for the Blind to deal with inquiries and any problems arising over the delivery of test papers.

Gang Rape Poem

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement on the inclusion of a poem on gang rape used in the London Examination Board GCSE syllabus.

Mr. Forth: This poem was not prescribed for study as part of any syllabus published by the University of London Examinations and Assessment Council. I understand that it was selected by one school as one of the poems to be studied and written about under a syllabus which left the choice to the school. The selection by schools of material for study is a matter for the school concerned, but having read the poem I believe that it was unsuitable and regrettable.

Testing

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the estimated cost of the national key stage testing for all school children in England and Wales in each subject and at each key stage for this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The estimated costs of producing and distributing the statutory tests for 1993 in English, mathematics, science and Welsh at key stage 1—seven-year-olds—is £1,230,000. The estimated cost of the non-mandatory tests at this key stage is £1,470,000.

The cost of the statutory tests in English, mathematics, science, technology and Welsh at key stage 3—14-year-olds—is £4,090,000. This includes support materials.

At key stage 2 there are no statutory assessments this year.

Teachers (Earnings)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish a table showing the earnings of qualified teachers on each scale point from one to 10 in real terms at January 1993 prices for each year since 1990-91; and if he will provide estimates for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Boswell: The following table shows the values of the points on the standard scale for qualified teachers other than heads and deputies at 1 April 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993. These have been converted to January 1993 prices by use of the retail prices index. Teachers paid on the standard scale may also be paid incentive allowances at one of five rates—currently £1,302, £2,109, £4,218, £5,625, and £7,734—and other discretionary payments. The salaries listed exclude London weighting. Teachers in service on 1 May 1993 will receive a lump sum of £90. The standard scale will cease to exist in September 1993 when a new pay spine for classroom teachers will be introduced.

Standard scale for qualified teachers

Point	at 1 April 1990	1 April 1991	1 April 1992	1 April 1993
	Salary			
	£	£	£	£
[1]1	9,918	10,582		
1	10,295	10,582	11,115	11,032
2	10,685	11,142	11,703	11,614
3	11,072	11,701	12,290	12,197
4	11,991	12,261	12,875	12,780
5	12,953	13,097	13,754	13,651
6	13,780	13,933	14,631	14,522
7	14,606	14,770	15,510	15,394
8	15,433	15,606	16,387	16,265
9	16,418	16,719	17,556	17,425
10	17,327	17,832	18,721	18,584

[1] The 11-point scale was shortened by one point on 1 December 1991 and the old point 1 disappeared.

SCOTLAND

Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a statement on the role of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The citizens charter highlighted the importance of the role of the main public service inspectorates in checking that the service providers meet the needs of the public which they serve, and the "Justice Charter for Scotland" which I published in November 1991 provided undertakings as to the manner in which Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland would perform this role. Further information about the inspectorate is provided in a leaflet under the title "The Role of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Scotland" which I have published today.

The leaflet incorporates a statement of principles for the inspectorate which focuses on the key principles of independence, openness, lay involvement and objectivity. It also explains the role and organisation of the inspectorate, and describes the process of annual inspection of police forces in Scotland. Particular attention is drawn to the arrangements which are made by the inspectorate to obtain the view of members of the public and to ensure that the public have access to the reports of their inspections. The leaflet will be available in police stations and in public libraries throughout Scotland.

I have placed copies of the leaflet in the Library.

General Practitioners

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what limitations are imposed on the reimbursement of general practitioners performing minor surgery;

on what grounds these limitations are imposed; when he plans to review the arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* Under the statement of fees and allowances for general medical practitioners in Scotland which are determined by the Secretary of State after consultation with representatives of the medical profession, a general medical practitioner on the local health board's minor surgery list is entitled to a fee for undertaking a minor surgery session—comprising five procedures. Payment is limited to a maximum of three sessions per quarter.

There are no plans to review these arrangements.

Kerr Little

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of public money given to the meat processing and butchering company, Kerr Little, not in receivership, in the past two years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* Kerr Little was awarded an EC grant in 1992 worth £173,574 and had earlier been made an offer of regional selective assistance worth £145,000 by Scottish Office Industry Department. The Scottish Office is in contact with the receiver in the interest of safeguarding public money already paid to the company, which totals £186,142.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* people and *(b)* males aged 16 years or over were recorded by the 1991 census in Scotland as economically inactive; and what percentage these figures represent of the population in each case.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* In the 1991 census of population there were 1,581,059 persons in Scotland who were aged 16 and over and economically inactive. This figure is 39·6 per cent. of all persons aged 16 and over. The corresponding figures for males are 510,718 and 27·2.

Farmers and Fishermen

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many officials are employed by his Department to administer, inspect, regulate and advise the farming and fishing industries either directly, in agencies or on special contracts *(a)* in 1992 and *(b)* at the latest available date; how many (i) farmers and (ii) fishermen there are in Scotland, full or part time; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The total numbers of staff employed by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department, the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency and the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency at 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1993 are shown in the following table, together with the most recent figures available on the numbers of farmers and fishermen in Scotland.

Staff numbers (full-time equivalent[1])

	1 April 1992 Number	*Number*	*1 April 1993 Number*
SOAFD	1,033·5		1,071·5
SASA	138·5		142·0
SFPA	215·5		225·5
Farmers[2]			
Full-time		12,700	
Part-time		10,200	
Fishermen[3]			
Full-time		7,181	
Part-time		955	

[1] Figures are calculated as full-time equivalents (i.e., part-time staff are counted as half units) and include administrative, professional, technical, industrial and support grades. Casual staff are excluded.
[2] Includes partners and directors as at 1992 June agricultural census.
[3] SOAFD figures as at December 1992.

Nurse Regrading

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of outstanding regrading appeals by nurses on each of the health board areas.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* I understand that virtually no nurse clinical grading appeals submitted under section 32 of the General Whitley Council conditions of service are oustanding at health board level. On 1 May 1993, 478 appeals to the Scottish Appeals Committee were outstanding. On the same date 482 appeals at national level remitted by the Nursing and Midwifery Staffs Negotiating Council to the Scottish Appeal Team secretariat were outstanding; the breakdown of these by health board is given in the table.

Health Board	*Scottish Appeals Committee Outstanding*	*National Level Appeals Outstanding*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	18	29	47
Ayrshire and Arran	13	40	53
Borders	6	11	17
Dumfries and Galloway	16	9	25
Fife	48	25	73
Forth Valley	94	74	168
Grampian	14	6	20
Greater Glasgow	74	59	133
Highland	9	23	32
Lanarkshire	56	54	110
Lothian	21	54	75
Orkney	2	—	2
Shetland	1	3	4
Tayside	106	75	181
Western Isles	—	8	8
CSA	—	12	12
State Hospital	—	—	—
Total	478	482	960

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total numbers of sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) quadruplets, (iv) quintuplets and (v) sextuplets born in Scotland in each year since 1980 and the total number of maternities in Scotland in each year; and how many

multiple births of each type in each year were conceived as a result of *(a)* in-vitro fertilisation, *(b)* gamete intra-fallopian transfer and *(c)* other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The information is as follows:

	Type of birth					Total maternities
	Twin	Triplet	Quadruplet	Quintuplet	Sextuplet	
1980	658	4	—	—	—	68,689
1981	611	7	—	—	—	68,865
1982	607	6	—	—	—	65,963
1983	677	2	—	—	—	64,776
1984	665	10	—	—	—	64,800
1985	681	9	—	—	—	66,342
1986	721	10	—	—	—	65,456
1987	721	10	—	—	—	65,839
1988	706	9	1	—	—	65,842
1989	677	13	2	—	—	63,090
1990	731	16	1	—	—	65,556
1991	709	24	2	—	—	66,630
1992[1]	808	15	—	—	—	65,307

[1] Provisional.

Information on the number of multiple births in Scotland attributed to assisted reproduction is not available. Some information on these matters is published in the first annual report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, and in earlier annual reports of the interim licensing authority, copies of which are available in the Library.

Court Cases

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases heard by *(a)* district courts, *(b)* sheriff courts and *(c)* the High Court resulted in (i) convictions, (ii) a verdict of not proven and (iii) dismissals, for the last seven years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The available information is given in the table:

Persons called to court by outcome 1985-91 Scotland

Year	PNGS[1] or Deserted	Acquitted Not Guilty	Acquitted Not Proven	Charge Proved	Total
High Court					
1985	31	134	66	805	1,036
1986	32	156	75	793	1,056
1987	36	147	72	858	1,113
1988	51	95	77	801	1,024
1989	50	96	73	746	965
1990	61	111	70	757	999
1991	81	94	78	743	996
Sheriff Court					
1985	4,187	6,521	1,224	100,110	112,042
1986	4,701	6,515	1,226	96,119	108,561
1987	4,632	6,412	1,200	91,955	104,199
1988	5,592	4,703	1,224	91,164	102,683
1989	6,538	4,739	1,366	90,721	103,364
1990	7,922	4,281	1,313	88,202	101,718
1991	7,554	3,682	1,137	82,723	95,096
District Court					
1985	2,857	3,193	625	72,006	78,681
1986	2,874	2,871	556	71,427	77,728
1987	2,865	3,044	532	72,150	78,591
1988	2,958	2,768	502	74,839	81,067
1989	3,012	2,449	553	74,123	80,137
1990	3,623	2,347	578	76,904	83,452
1991	3,295	2,270	496	77,725	83,786

[1] Plea of not guilty accepted.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hostel Accommodation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average weekly cost to the DHSS in Northern Ireland for providing a place for a single person in hostel accommodation.

Mr. Hanley: The average weekly accommodation cost met by DHSS through the housing benefit scheme for a single resident in a hostel is £98.72.

Terrorism

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have been killed or injured as a result of fire and explosion during terrorist incidents in the past three years.

Mr. Mates: The available information is set out in the table. Information on persons injured in fires is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland

	Deaths as a result of:		Injuries as a result of:
	Explosions	Fires	Explosions
1990	22	—	115
1991	18	2	234
1992	11	—	200

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are receiving benefits in respect of myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Hanley: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Social Security Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Alec Wylie. However, I have been advised that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Multiple Births

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total numbers of sets of (i) twins, (ii) triplets, (iii) quadruplets, (iv) quintuplets and (v) sextuplets born in Northern Ireland in each year since 1980 and the total number of maternities in Northern Ireland in each year; and how many multiple births of each type in each year were conceived as a result of *(a)* in-vitro fertilisation, *(b)* gamete intra-fallopian transfer and *(c)* other forms of assisted conception.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The information requested is set out in the table:

Type	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	[1]*1992*
Sets of:													
(i) Twins	298	305	306	263	304	272	281	322	287	281	267	315	258
(ii) Triplets	4	3	2	4	3	3	2	7	1	2	5	6	8
(iii) Quadruplets	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—
(iv) Quintuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
(v) Sextuplets	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Maternities	28,542	27,229	26,905	27,188	27,547	27,529	27,989	27,694	27,614	25,928	25,338	26,058	25,425
(a) IVF[2,3]													
(i) Twins								—	7	5	12	11	N/K
(ii) Triplets								—	—	1	2	1	N/K
(b) GIFT[3]								—					

[1] Provisional.
[2] These figures are the results of IVF by year of conception.
[3] IVF has been available in Northern Ireland only since 1987.
GIFT was available in Northern Ireland in only 1986 and 1987.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *554*, what was the nature of the Minister responsible for health and agriculture's visit to the constituency of Upper Bann on 24 February; and with regard to that visit and his visits of 17 February and 20 April, when and how he endeavoured to inform the hon. Member for that constituency.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* My noble friend the Lord Arran visited Avondale Foods (Craigavon) Ltd., Lurgan and hosted a private dinner on 24 February 1993.

Telephone calls were made to the hon. Member's constituency office, giving notification of all the visits, at least the day before the visit.

PRIME MINISTER

Manchester Airport

Q6. Mr. Mans: To ask the Prime Minister when he next intends to visit Manchester airport.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has at present no plans to do so.

Environmental Appraisal

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Departments have carried out an environmental appraisal of their policy-making and administrative procedures.

The Prime Minister: All Departments must ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account in developing their policies and programmes. Papers to Cabinet and ministerial committees should, where appropriate, cover any significant costs or benefits to the environment. We are firmly committed to the principle that "green issues" must be built into decision taking throughout Government.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 25 May.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the unveiling of a memorial statue to Field Marshal the Viscount Alanbrooke by Her Majesty the Queen as is, I understand, the Leader of the official Opposition.

Smoke Alarms

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to ensure that smoke alarms are fitted in all new publicly owned dwellings and buildings.

The Prime Minister: It has been policy to provide smoke alarms in all new dwellings since 1 June 1992.

Smoke alarms in other buildings—whether public or privately owned—are normally required under licensing or certification arrangements where appropriate.

Output

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a table showing in index form and as a percentage the growth in output between 1963 and 1973, 1973 and 1979 and 1979 to date of each of the mechanical engineering, textiles, clothing, footwear, cars, commercial

vehicles, leather, man-made fibres, metals, metal goods not elsewhere specified and shipbuilding industries, together with (i) the change in their weight as a percentage of manufacturing output and the weight of manufacturing in gross domestic product, (ii) figures of import penetration by the EEC and the rest of the world, including an estimate from the year ended June 1989 and (iii) the change in their share of exports of the main manufacturing countries.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been asked to reply.

Complete information is not available. Output indices for the industries listed below are available from the central shared database (CSDB) operated by the Central Statistical Office, which can be accessed from the Library of the House.

	Indices
Mechanical engineering (class 32)	DVJA
Textiles (class 43)	DVJI
Clothing, leather and footwear (published group 44/45)	DVJJ
Motor vehicles (published group 35)	DVJC
Man-made fibres (class 26)	DVIX
Metals (published group 21/22)	DVIT
Metal goods NES (class 31)	DVIZ
Other transport (class 36)	DVJD

The weights within manufacturing for each of the above groups and manufacturing within gross domestic product in the index base years are as follows:

	1963	*1975*	*1980*	*1985*
32	15·5	16·9	19·6	17·9
43	7·2	5·3	4·4	4·5
44/45	4·9	5·3	5·1	5·3
35	7·3	7·3	7·8	8·0
26	1·2	0·8	0·4	0·5
21/22	8·3	6·6	4·7	5·5
31	7·5	7·8	8·3	7·8
36	6·5	5·6	6·9	7·7
Manufacturing	35·3	30·0	26·5	23·8

Information on import penetration from 1970 to 1979 was published in the June 1980 edition of "Economic Trends". Subsequent data up to the year ended June 1989 were published in "Business Monitor MQ12"; annual summaries are published in table 12·2 of the "Annual Abstract of Statistics". These publications are available in the Library of the House. The figures do not separate the EC from the rest of the world.

Export statistics for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries are published in OECD series C—"Foreign Trade by Commodities", which is available in the Library of the House. To extract these on a comparable basis for the sectors required would involve disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount spent by her Department in each of the last six years in relation to *(a)* coronary heart disease and *(b)* strokes.

Mr. Sackville: Total expenditure on coronary heart disease (CHD) and stroke is impossible to calculate with any precision. The "Health of the Nation" White Paper contains estimates that CHD accounts for 2·5 per cent. of total national health service expenditure and stroke for 6 per cent. of total expenditure, but figures are not routinely collected. Expenditure nationally on prevention of CHD and stroke, including expenditure on risk factors such as smoking, alcohol and nutrition, exceeds £10 million a year, but this takes no account of unquantifiable expenditure on, for example, advice given to patients by health professionals.

NHS Staff

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent employees there were in each of the last five years at *(a)* the Department of Health, *(b)* the NHS management executive and *(c)* each regional health authority.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is shown in the table.

Department of Health and NHS management executive 1989-93
Whole-time equivalents as at 1 April

	Department of Health	*NHS management executive*[1]
1989	8,799	666
1990	5,388	797
1991	4,651	677
1992	4,803	776
1993	4,846	931

[1] Figures also included in overall Department of Health numbers.

The Department has reduced in size over the last five years largely through functions not core to its business being transferred to the national health service, non-departmental public bodies, or other agencies. Some 3,200 staff in the special hospitals transferred to the Special Hospital Service Authority in 1989.

Fluctuations in the size of the national health service management executive over time are a result of adjustments in responsibilities between the NHSME and the rest of the Department.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 26 March, *Official Report*, columns *748-50*, for information on regional health authority employees.

Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the names and main appointments of each of the members of each of the selected list catetgory sub-committees which have been advising the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs; and if she will make public the details of the advice which each of the selected list category asuo-committees advising the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs have offered to the committee.

Dr. Mawhinney: Sub-committee members are drawn from the membership of the Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs whose names and main appointments have been announced. The main committee and its sub-committees are independent and we do not intend to publish their advice.

Drugs (Calendar Packs)

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her estimate of how much money is lost to the NHS through doctors prescribing extra calendar packs of drugs, to make up for shortfalls because calendar packs are issued in 28 day units;

(2) what considerations underline the policy of supplying calendar packs of drugs produced for the NHS in 28 day units rather than 30 day units.

Dr. Mawhinney: Pharmaceutical companies are responsible for determining what size calendar packs of drugs they produce. These are usually in 28 or 30 day units. General practitioners prescribe the amount needed by their patients by indicating, for example, the number of days, weeks or months of treatment or the number of calendar packs they wish to be supplied. There is no information to suggest that money is lost to the national health service because doctors find it necessary to prescribe extra quantities of drugs which are produced in calendar packs of 28 day units.

German Measles

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the number of cases of German measles in *(a)* each complete year since 1980 and *(b)* in 1993 to date.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Notifications of Rubella[1] (German measles) 1989-93

	Number
1989	24,570
1990	11,491
1991	7,174
1992	6,212
1993	[2]4,977

[1] Rubella (German measles) only became a notifiable disease in October 1988 and therefore the first complete year for which there are statistics is 1989.
[2] Provisional figure for 1993, up to and including 7 May.

Wellhouse Trust

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number of *(a)* nurses, *(b)* doctors and *(c)* laboratory technicians employed by the Wellhouse trust in each year since 1980; and what has been the total number of beds in the hospital of the trust in each such year.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. Tony Orton, the chairman of the Wellhouse Trust, for details.

Sight Impairment

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the North West regional health authority are registered blind; and what is the total number of people with severe sight impairment.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available centrally.

Research and Development

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she will set up a pilot multidisciplinary based centre for research and development; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: We have decided to establish a university based research and development centre in the field of primary health care. The increasing importance of this sector means that it is now opportune to develop a capacity to carry out long-term high quality research and development. The delivery of primary care is vital both to the health and well-being of the population and to the effective and efficient delivery of health care services and, increasingly, innovative forms of service delivery and new initiatives in care and treatment are emerging within this sector. Primary care leads the demand for a range of services and, at the present time, is especially significant in inner cities in general and in London in particular. In the coming years, primary care will continue to be a source of exciting developments for the health service.

The establishment of a dedicated long-term research centre will ensure that these developments are linked to research-based information, while taking into account likely changes in organisation and delivery of care. Both primary care and the programme of research will be defined broadly, to take into account not only the general medical service and general practice but also the flow of patients between primary and secondary care and the nature of the interface between the sectors.

The centre will be established by selective competitive tender from universities in England and Wales. This process will be led by Professor Michael Peckham, the director of research and development. A key consideration in selecting the successful bid will be the extent to which universities show that they can harnesss a significant contribution to this research field from other funders, including the private sector. Advertisements, and letters to universities inviting expressions of interest in tendering for the centre, will be published shortly.

Multiple Disabilities

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to place a duty on social services departments to draw up a specific policy for meeting the needs of young people and adults with multiple disabilities, under the responsibility of a named officer, and to include this within community care plans and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities are already required to prepare plans for the provision of community care services in their area. We expect these plans to set out how the authority intends to meet the needs of the whole of its population, including disabled people. Plans must be published and available to the public.

Diethylstilboestrol

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what abnormalities, other than vaginal cancer, have been identified amongst daughters of women who were prescribed the drug diethylstilboestrol; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Daughters of women given diethylstilboestrol (DES) in pregnancy may have a small

increased risk of developing minor benign lesions of the cervix, and of complications of pregnancy such as premature labour. Congenital abnormalities of the vagina and uteris, infertility and psychological problems have also been identified as possible complications of DES exposure.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incidence of testicular cancer has been discovered among sons whose mothers were prescribed the drug diethylstilboestrol; and if she will make a statement

Dr. Mawhinney: Accurate information is not available. An association with testicular cancer has been claimed but not conclusively proven. Recent research on this issue is currently being evaluated by the Department.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what attempts have been made by her Department to track down those women, together with their sons and daughters, who were prescribed the drug diethylstilboestrol.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Ms Nicholson) on 5 June 1990 at columns *589-90*.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what continuing research into the long-term effects of the drug diethylstilboestrol is being carried out in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are not aware of any such research.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women she estimates to have been prescribed the drug diethylstilboestrol in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: It has been estimated that around 7,500 women were prescribed diethylstilboestrol (DES) during pregnancy in the United Kingdom. A small number of post-menopausal women have received oral DES for the treatment of breast cancer, and in the form of a vaginal pessary for the treatment of post-menopausal vaginitis.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when and for what reason the decision was taken for the drug diethylstilboestrol no longer to be made available for general prescription in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: Diethylstilboestrol (DES) may still be prescribed in the United Kingdom for certain restricted indications. DES is currently licensed for use in the management of prostatic cancer and breast cancer in post-menopausal women. A vaginal pessary containing DES is also licensed for use in the treatment of post-menopausal vaginitis due to oestrogen deficiency. DES is contra-indicated in pregnancy and pre-menopausal women.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence of vaginal cancers have emerged among those women who were prescribed diethylstilboestrol.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is no evidence to suggest that women prescribed diethylstilboestrol (DES) are more likely to develop vaginal cancers. An increased risk of clear-cell adenocarcinoma of the vagina or cervix applies to the daughters of women prescribed DES during pregnancy.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what brand names the drug diethylstilboestrol was marketed and made available in the United Kingdom.

Dr. Mawhinney: Diethylstilboestrol has been marketed under the following brand names: Stilboestrol, Stilboestrol B.P., Tampovagan stilboestrol and lactic acid pessary, Honvan, Menopax, Sedestran, Merven and Pabestrol.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment her Department has made of research carried out in other countries about the long-term effects of the drug diethylstilboestrol on those women for whom it was prescribed and on their sons and daughters.

Dr. Mawhinney: The United Kingdom Licensing Authority and its advisory committees carefully monitor the safety of all licensed medicines, including diethylistilboestrol (DES). Information relating to the safety of DES is monitored and assessed as and when it becomes available.

The Licensing Authority liaises with other EC member states on this issue.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information her Department has received about planned or actual litigation against the manufacturers and suppliers of the drug diethylstilboestrol *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* overseas.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Prescriptions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many items of prescription are dispensed each day *(a)* to those exempt from charges and *(b)* to those paying for prescriptions; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1992, an average of 1·06 million prescribed items were dispensed each day by community pharmacists and appliance contractors, of which about 858,000 went to patients exempt from charges or entitled to charge remission and some 202,000 went to patients who paid charges or held prescription prepayment certificates.

Drugs

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date she received the research report from Durham university, prepared for her Department, on the prevalence of drug use among young people.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department has not commissioned such research.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance she has given to NHS trusts on how to handle requests from hon. Members for information.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) on 27 April at column *350*.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing the earnings of day

nursery assistants under the age of 19 years, day nursery assistants over the age of 19 years and staff nursery nurses and special school nurses group A in real terms at January 1993 prices for each year since 1990-91; and if she will provide estimates for the years 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Sackville: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Prescriptions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will estimate savings to the Exchequer in a full year of ending exemptions for prescriptions for *(a)* pregnant women, *(b)* pensioners and *(c)* children; and if she will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: No firm figures are available. Any savings which might accrue from ending universal charge exemption from the groups cited by the hon. Member would be abated by the cost of income-related charge remission under the national health service low-income scheme, exemption on medical grounds, and by the take-up of prescription prepayment certificates.

Manchester and Trafford Electorates

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will state the total parliamentary electorates of, respectively, the City of Manchester and the borough of Trafford.

Mr. Sackville: There are 311,274 and 168,132 parliamentary electors on the registers, which came into use on 16 February 1993, for the City of Manchester and the borough of Trafford respectively.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Safety Audits

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the results of the most recent nuclear safety audits carried out at Rosyth and Devonport dockyards; what accreditations were given as a result of these safety audits; and what were the changes in these accreditations relative to previous nuclear safety audits carried out at the two dockyards.

Mr. Aitken: The most recent nuclear and radiation safety audits of the royal dockyards confirm the continuing improvement in safety standards and awareness, already very high, throughout the naval nuclear propulsion programme.

Nuclear Submarine Refits

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the Government have spent to date in assisting the preparation by contractors at *(a)* Rosyth and *(b)* Devonport dockyards of proposals for the new nuclear submarine refitting facility in respect of (i) the upgrade of existing docks and (ii) the development of new build facilities.

Mr. Aitken: Individual payments to contractors are commercially confidential and therefore cannot be publicly disclosed.

Armaments and Explosives (Shipping)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ports are used by his Department for shipping abroad armaments and explosives.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For routine movements the Department uses the ports or Marchwood military port, Ridham, Liverpool, Felixstowe, Poole, Hull and Colchester. During the Gulf crisis, the ports of Southampton, RNAD Crombie, Cliffe Jetty (River Thames) and Newport were also used. Cliffe Jetty and Newport are routinely used for movement of United States forces equipment, the arrangements for which are made by my Department.

"Options for Change"

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those significant buildings which have become or are likely to become redundant as a consequence of the "Options for Change" programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Defence Exhibition, Abu Dhabi

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representatives of the United Kingdom Government and of what rank, civil or military, attended the 1993 international defence exhibition in Abu Dhabi; and at what cost.

Mr. Aitken: Some 24 civilian and uniformed members of my Department attended some part of this important exhibition, including the Head of Defence Exports Services and myself. Officers and men from HMS Nottingham also participated. Details of the extra costs of all those attending are not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Maritime Defence Exhibition, Brighton

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representatives of the United Kingdom Government and of what rank, civil or military, attended the 1993 international maritime defence exhibition and conference in Brighton; and at what cost.

Mr. Aitken: This is a matter delegated to the Defence Research Agency under its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. A. R. Chisholm to Mr. Menzies Campbell, dated 25 May 1993.

In today's written answer the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed you that I would be replying to your question about the International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference.

The event which took place at Brighton between 31 March and 2 April was organised by a private company, Spearhead Exhibitions Ltd. and sponsored by the Defence Research Agency. It was intended for those with a close professional interest in current and future maritime operations and procurement related issues and attracted around 2,500 visitors from 47 countries.

Some 350 Ministry of Defence representatives, civil and military, attended the exhibition and conference, the majority coming from those staffs concerned with maritime operations sea systems procurement and defence sales. There was no

charge for attending the exhibition but a fee of £295 was levied for attending the conference. Of the 350 MOD visitors, some 50 attended the conference although half of these were either VIP guests or speakers and consequently were not required to pay the fee. A breakdown of paying visitors by grade is set out below:

Grades/Ranks	*Numbers*
3	1
5	2
6	3
7	7
"S"	3
"H"	3
PTO	2
Capt RN	1
Cdr RN	2

There were also about 150 fee paying delegates from industry attending the conference.

I hope you will find this helpful.

Aerospace Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 May, *Official Report*, column *523*, to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on the defence industrial base, what discussions he has held about the planned merger of the missile divisions of British Aerospace and Matra-Hachette.

Mr. Aitken: Representatives of British Aerospace have informed me and my officials about their discussions with Matra-Hachette on a proposed joint venture between the two companies' missile businesses.

Helicopter Landing Platform

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the evaluation of the tender from VSEL for the LPH included a comparison of the overhead rates for the LPH contract and those for the Trident submarine contracts.

Mr. Aitken: Both LPH bids were assessed against our normal criteria for competitive contracts.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether the engines specified by VSEL in their tender for the LPH satisfy the captive shock requirements;

(2) what assurances he has received that the LPH constructed according to the successful tender will satisfy the requirements for a Panama canal certificate.

Mr. Aitken: VSEL has contracted to meet all our requirements.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement of 20 April, *Official Report*, column 165, if he has decided whether to withdraw 4 Armoured Field Ambulance from Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Four armoured field ambulance will be withdrawn from UNPROFOR in Croatia on 6 June, and will be replaced by 5 Field Ambulance, which will deploy with UNPROFOR for three months.

Defence Animal Centre

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Defence Animal Centre.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Defence Animal Centre (DAC) will be launched as a defence agency on 1 June 1993. The DAC is located at Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire and employs 195 service personnel and 43 civilians. Part of the joint service dog training wing is at RAF Newton and this is also included within the boundaries of the agency, as is the subsidiary site at Syerston. The full cost budget for the DAC for 1992-93 is around £10 million.

The role of the DAC is to procure, train and issue dogs and horses, to train personnel in their handling and care, and to provide supporting veterinary services. The high professional standards of the DAC will be maintained and agency status will provide the chief executive with new opportunities to improve the efficiency and value for money of his organisation. Colonel Paul Jepson has been appointed as the agency's chief executive. The corporate strategy of the DAC will be pursued in the context of the following first year key targets:

1. *Trained output*
   Agreed numbers to be trained:

	Number
Dogs	380
Horses	50
Dog handlers	536
Equine managers	18

2. *Success rate*
   To achieve trained output within in-training wastage rates of:

	Percentage
Dogs	39
Horses	10
Dog handlers	5
Equine managers	10

3. *Cost*
   To achieve programmed output within budget.
4. *Efficiency*
   To produce agreed costs proposals, by 1 April 1994, to reduce the cost per animal/handler through improved efficiency in the management and training of animals and personnel, and by collocation and rationalisation of resources.
5. *Management systems*
   To install a financial accounting and management information system package to enable operation of a full cost accruals accounting system by 1 April 1994.
6. *Market testing*
   To evaluate the impact in value-for-money terms of market testing all agency functions which do not have a direct war role; to identify in order of priority agency functions to be market tested in a programme which will begin by 1 April 1994.
7. *Customer satisfaction*
   To conduct a customer satisfaction survey of quality and, by 1 April 1994, set targets for improvement.

I have placed a copy of the framework document in the Library of the House.

Manadon Engineering College

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions he has reached about the future of the Royal Naval Engineering College at Manadon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The future requirement for naval engineer officer training has been reviewed in the light of reduced future numbers of engineer officers, the need to make economies in support infrastructure and the increased availability of higher education in the civilian sector. The review has concluded that the most cost effective way to meet the Navy's future needs for engineer officers is to establish a sponsorship scheme based on a civilian university. Under this scheme, which would complement the existing direct graduate recruitment, students would study for an engineering degree, relevant to naval needs, and upon successfully completing the course would be offered a commission in the Navy. This would replace the in-service engineering degree training currently provided at Manadon.

I have accepted this recommendation as the basis for consultation and a final decision will be taken in the light of representations made. A consultation document is being issued to interested parties and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House. Unless alternative uses for it could be found, Manadon would close in 1995, with consequent implications for the 175 civilian staff employed there. Manadon has a long and proud tradition and has served the Navy well. But in today's circumstances other means exist of providing high-quality training for naval engineer officers and it is right that they should be utilised.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Croatia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to raise the matter of minority rights in the Republic of Croatia with the Croatian Government or its representatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Minority rights in Croatia were a key element of the negotiations pursued by the Carrington conference in 1991-92 and of the principles agreed at the London conference on the former Yugoslavia in August 1992. The co-chairmen of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia and the chairmen of the working group on ethnic and national communities and minority working group are in regular close contact with the Croatian Government and have been mandated by the EC and United Nations to promote negotiations on this issue. We fully support the work of the co-chairmen and take every opportunity to impress on the Croatian Government the importance of co-operating with the co-chairmen to resolve the problems of minorities within Croatia.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the German Foreign Minister on German involvement in the transfer of arms to the Republic of Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not discussed this issue with the German Foreign Minister. We continue to believe that it is vital that all countries scrupulously observe the arms embargo imposed under United Nations Security Council resolution 713.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has received from President General Tudjman of Croatia to the message sent by EC member states on 12 May protesting at Croatian aggression and ethnic cleansing in Mostar.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: President Tudjman replied on 13 May to the President of the EC Council of Ministers, Mr. Petersen. He listed initiatives taken by the Croatian Government to try to bring the situation in central Bosnia under control, and asserted that Croatia was not responsible for the aggression of the Bosnian Croats. President Tudjman repeated these points at a meeting he held with the German Foreign Minister on 14 May. Mr. Kinkel repeated the EC demand that President Tudjman should exert his influence over the Bosnian Croats in order to stop the fighting.

Croatia (Mercenaries)

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests Her Majesty's Government have made to the Croatian representative in London regarding the recruitment of British mercenaries; what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to discourage British citizens from joining Croatian forces; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no evidence that the Croatian Government are involved in recruiting British citizens as mercenaries; no such protest has therefore been made. In certain circumstances it is an offence, under the Foreign Enlistment Act 1870, for a British citizen to enlist in the armed forces of a foreign state. The decision whether to investigate, or to prosecute, any alleged offender is a matter for the police and for the prosecuting authorities respectively. Our consular travel advice strongly advises British citizens not to travel to the regions of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, including parts of Croatia.

Turkey

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to pay an official visit to Turkey.

Mr. Garel-Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to visit Turkey in the near future.

Armenia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response the Armenian Government have given to proposals for a ceasefire and a withdrawal or Armenian troops from Azerbaijan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Armenian Government have responded positively to the latest trilateral initiative by the Governments of the United States, Turkey and Russia for a ceasefire and a withdrawal of troops from in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, and for a resumption of talks under the auspices of the conference on security and

co-operation in Europe. However, the Armenian Government have not yet given their formal approval to this plan. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I will use the opportunity of our meeting with the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Armenia on 27 May to urge the Armenian Government to accept this latest proposal, and to use their influence with the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh to do the same.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 21 May at column *352*.

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs further to his statement of 2 April, *Official Report*, column 774, if he will make a statement on progress towards the attainment of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Since 2 April, President Clinton and President Yeltsin have agreed to pursue negotiations towards a multilateral test ban. The United States will be consulting further with other nuclear powers, including the United Kingdom. Our concern will remain the safety of existing nuclear weapons, and to ensure that any eventual agreement is as effective as possible in contributing to non-proliferation.

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the issue of human rights and the autonomy of non-governmental organisations with the Indonesian authorities at the Tokyo G7 meeting and at the Paris consortium meeting on Indonesia in July.

Mr. Goodlad: We and our EC partners maintain a regular dialogue on human rights and related matters with the Indonesian authorities and raise these issues at meetings of the appropriate international bodies.

Macedonia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current situation of the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia with regard to international recognition, and qualification for assistance from know-how funds, PHARE funds, the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: With respect to recognition of Macedonia by the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) on 23 April at column *243*. The know-how fund does not extend to Macedonia, but the United Kingdom has committed £2 million in bilateral assistance for emergency aid to Macedonia in this financial year. Macedonia qualifies for assistance from PHARE; 45 mecu has been committed. Macedonia is a member of the IMF and the EBRD, but not yet a member of the World bank.

Bosnia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific representations Her Majesty's Government have made to *(a)* Bosnian-Serb leaders, *(b)* Bosnian-Croat leaders and *(c)* Bosnian-Muslim leaders over the need to observe cease-fire agreements.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We take every opportunity to impress upon the Bosnian parties the urgent need to stop the fighting. We attach the highest importance to achieving a political settlement which could bring the conflict to an end, and fully support the work of the co-chairmen of the international conference on the former Yugoslavia to this end.

St. Helena

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the next ministerial visit to St. Helena will take place; and how many visits to St. Helena by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* other official delegations have taken place in the last 10 years.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There are at present no plans for a ministerial visit to St. Helena. There have been no such visits in the last 10 years. There have been two official delegations, both of which included Members of Parliament, over the period and various official visits by civil servants.

China

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made to the Government of the Republic of China on the recent persecution of Christians in Shaanxi province; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We are aware of this disturbing report through our contacts with Amnesty International and other non-government organisations. Although we have not raised this particular matter, we regularly raise human rights, including the continued persecution of religious believers, with the Chinese authorities, urging them to adhere to international standards of behaviour.

Greek Economy

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held during meetings of EC foreign ministers on the effect of sanctions against the former Yugoslavia on the Greek economy.

Mr. Garel-Jones: All countries can discuss the effects of sanctions with the international financial institutions, which are best placed to provide technical and, where appropriate, financial support. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 10 May, the Foreign Minister of Greece drew attention to his country's concerns about the effects of sanctions on the Greek economy. The meeting also agreed on the importance of rigorous implementation of the sanctions regime.

Georgia

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessments he has made of the policies of the Georgian Government with respect to the principles of good government and human rights; and if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and the Government of Georgia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We urge the Governments of all the countries of the former Soviet Union, including Georgia, to respect the principles of good government and human rights in line with their commitment to respect UN and CSCE principles. We are concerned about reports of human rights abuses by both sides involved in the dispute in Abkhazia. I discussed this dispute with the visiting Georgian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Chikvaidze, on 24 May. Relations between the United Kingdom and Georgia are good. We have emphasised the need for the Georgian Government to continue to work with the UN and CSCE in seeking a fair and peaceful solution to the disputes on their territory.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the numbers of British citizens fighting as mercenaries in the former Yugoslavia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are aware of reports that British citizens have fought as mercenaries in the former Yugoslavia, but we have no information on the numbers.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with Herr Klaus Kinkel, the German Foreign Minister, following his recent visit to the Republic of Croatia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Mr. Kinkel and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs both attended the WEU Council meeting in Rome on 19 May which issued a declaration on the situation in the former Yugoslavia, including Croatia.

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Disputes

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many days were lost in the industrial disputes in the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure for the same 12-month period 14 years ago.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Five hundred and eighty-eight thousand working days were lost compared with 14 million.

Youth Unemployment

15. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures for youth unemployment in Coventry.

Mr. McLoughlin: In April 1993, unadjusted claimant unemployment amongst under 25-year-olds was 5,969 in the Coventry local authority district.

23. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the percentage of people aged under 21 years out of work in Britain at the present time; and what information he has on the comparable figures for *(a)* France, *(b)* Germany, *(c)* Italy and *(d)* Spain.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The percentage of people aged under 21 out of work in Britain, based on the latest autumn 1992 labour force survey, is 45·5 per cent. The latest comparable figures for the other countries in question are for 1991 and I shall, with permission, arrange for them to be printed in a statistical table in the *Official Report*.

The following is the information:

The latest comparable figures for the other countries are for spring 1991 and for under 20-year-olds

	Percentage
France	26
West Germany	3·3
Italy	33·1
Spain	33·7

The rate for the United Kingdom for the same age group and year is 15·2 per cent.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what initiatives she proposes to reduce unemployment among people under 21 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Young people aged 16 or 17 who have left full-time education are guaranteed the offer of a suitable place on youth training. Youth credits are enabling more and more young people to acquire the skills businesses need. Our aim is to offer a credit to all school leavers under the age of 18 by 1996. Young people over the age of 18 are eligible for the full range of employment and training measures available through the employment service and training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies, including the new initiatives announced by the Chancellor in his budget statement on 16 March 1993.

Business Start-up Scheme

16. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on progress on the business start-up scheme in the north-west.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provisional statistics show that over 5,800 people entered the business start-up scheme in the north west during the 1992-93 financial year, which was close to the number planned by the training and enterprise councils in the region.

Plans for the 1993-94 year have not yet been finalised, but the number of entrants is expected to increase to reflect the north west's share of the additional 10,000 places announced by the Chancellor in the 1993 Budget speech.

24. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on progress on the business start-up scheme in the east midlands.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provisional statistics show that approximately 3,800 people entered the business start-up scheme in the east midlands during the 1992-93 financial year, which was ahead of the number planned by the training and enterprise councils in the region.

Plans for the 1993-94 year are expected to increase to approximately 4,400 entrants, reflecting the east midlands, share of the additional 10,000 places announced by the Chancellor in the 1993 Budget speech.

Unemployed People (Schemes)

17. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many schemes for the unemployed have been introduced since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This information is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. At present, unemployed people are offered the greatest ever range of help—over 1·5 million employment and training opportunities in 1993-94.

Training and Enterprise Councils

18. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of the training and enterprise councils in the north-west.

Mr. McLoughlin: They are doing a first-class job. They are making a real contribution to their local economies through their support for training, education and enterprise.

Unemployment Statistics

19. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to calculate the total number of people seeking work in the United Kingdom in addition to the number claiming unemployment benefit.

Mr. McLoughlin: These figures have been calculated and published since 1985. They are derived from the labour force survey, follow internationally standard definitions and cover the number of people in the United Kingdom without a job, who are seeking work and available to start it. Since September 1992, these figures have been published for Great Britain every quarter.

Training for Work

20. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a further statement on the implementation of training for work.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Training for work now gives long-term unemployed people improved opportunities to learn new skills, improve existing ones and to gain practical experience by doing temporary work.

Unemployment, Greenwich

21. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were registered as unemployed in the London borough of Greenwich at the last count; and what was the figure three years ago.

Mr. McLoughlin: Unadjusted claimant unemployment in the London borough of Greenwich stood at 5,135 in April 1993, and 2,604 in April 1990.

Unemployment, Holloway

22. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest available male unemployment level for the Holloway travel-to-work area.

Mr. McLoughlin: Holloway falls within the London travel-to-work area where in April 1993 unadjusted claimant unemployment for men was 327,253.

Job Plan

25. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on progress on job plan.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The new job plan programme, which I announced in the autumn statement, was launched on 29 March. Job plan workshops are one week events which help unemployed people assess their strengths, consider the employment and training options open to them and offer a priority in the application process to join other employment and training programmes.

Workshops are now being run throughout the country by a range of organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors contracted to the employment service. Over 5,000 people are starting each week.

Acquired Rights Directive

26. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a further statement about the operation of the acquired rights directive within the EC.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have nothing to add to my answer to the hon. Gentleman of 19 January 1993, column *183*.

Unemployment, Northern Region

27. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for how many months since May 1979 the northern region has had the highest regional unemployment in mainland Britain.

Mr. McLoughlin: Northern region has had the highest rate of seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment in mainland Britain in every month since May 1979.

Information

28. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to introduce regulations governing the information which employers may keep about their employees.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government have no plans to legislate on this issue.

Training Credits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make a statement on the vocational opportunities presented by training credits.

Mr. McLoughlin: Youth credits are issued to young people to enable them to obtain approved training from either an employer or a specialist training provider leading to national vocational qualification level 2 or higher. Since April 1991, 49,000 young people have taken up their entitlement to a youth credit.

Youth, Lambeth

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will make an estimate of *(a)* the number of young people leaving school and entering the

labour market in Lambeth in the last 12 months, *(b)* the percentage who obtained work on leaving school or college, *(c)* the numbers undergoing youth training and *(d)* the numbers obtaining qualifications as a result of that training during the last 12 months.

Mr. McLoughlin: This information is not available in the form requested.

Youth Training

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people have been waiting for eight weeks or more without the offer of a place; and what steps she is taking to provide youth training places for them.

Mr. McLoughlin: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are required to ensure that young people are made one or more offers of youth training within a reasonable period of time. In April—the latest date for which information is available—there were 3,436 young people in England who were covered by the YT guarantee, had been waiting for a YT place for eight or more weeks and had not previously had an offer of a place.

The contracts with TECs provide for regular reviews of the position on the YT guarantee both currently and prospectively. This Government continue to be committed to the guarantee and that is why TECs have been asked to treat this as a top priority. I am taking a close interest in progress in its delivery.

Job Plan Workshops

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidelines her Department has introduced concerning visits by hon. Members to job plan workshops; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 25 May 1993.

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question about visits by honourable Members to Jobplan Workshops. This is something which falls within the responsibility she has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The new Jobplan programme was launched by the Secretary of State on the 29 March. The workshops, which normally last for 5 days aim to help people who have been unemployed for a long time to compete more successfully for jobs and other training and employment opportunities.

Jobplan Workshops are run on the Employment Service's behalf by organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors. Over 650 contracts have been awarded following a full competitive tendering exercise. The workshops provide assessment and guidance to the standards set out in the Statement of Service established by the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate of the Employment Department.

Members of Parliament are welcome to visit workshops in their constituencies and guidance was issued in February to both Employment Service people and providers to ensure that visits take place as soon as possible after a request is received. I attach a copy of the guidelines which forms part of our contract with Jobplan providers.

Wherever possible we ask for advance notice of a visit so that arrangements can be made to keep disruption to the workshop to a minimum. Someone from the Employment Service will normally accompany a visitor to answer any questions that may arise about the programme.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Access to Programme—Non Employment Service Status

16.1 The Provider shall notify the Department in writing of proposed visits to the Programme by any person who has taken or will take no direct part in the conduct or content of the Programme (the 'Visitor'). Such persons shall include, but without limitation hereto, Representatives of Unemployment Centres and Members of the Press and Media. Notification shall be at least 7 days in advance in writing except in the event of an unforeseen visit when notification shall be by telephone as soon as possible.

16.2 Members of Parliament shall be granted access as soon as an accompanying representative of the Department is available.

16.3 Notification shall not include any person whose presence is related to the conduct or content of the Programme.

16.4 In determining whether any such person is a person whose visit shall be notified to the Department, as in Clause 16 the Department's view shall be sought.

16.5 Upon receiving such notification as required by Clause 16 the Department will inform the Provider as soon as reasonably practicable of the following:

(a) Any objection to the timing of the visit or nature of the person visiting. Upon receiving such objection the Provider shall cancel the visit or provide assurances to the satisfaction of the Department that such a visit will not be prejudicial to the conduct of the Programme.

(b) The Department's desire to have its authorised representatives attend at the proposed visit and accompany the visitor(s) and assist the Provider in the provision of information to the visitor.

16.6 The Department's decision shall be final.

Manufacturing Employment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the change in the level of full-time adult employment in manufacturing since 1973.

Mr. McLoughlin: Between June 1973 and March 1993 there was a net fall of 3,219,000 full-time employees in employment in Great Britain.

Conditions of Employment

Ms Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans her Department has to commission records into compliance with regulations and legislation governing the conditions of employment of *(a)* persons under 16 years of age and *(b)* persons between 16 and 18 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: Policy on the employment of young people above the minimum school leaving age falls within the responsibility of the Department of Employment. Legislation governing conditions of employment for this age group, where it differs from that applying to adults in the same occupations, is concerned primarily with health and safety matters.

The Government are advised on health and safety at work by the Health and Safety Commission. Relevant statutory provisions, which also include some restrictions on the employment of children below the minimum school

leaving age, are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive and local authority inspectors under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

The Health and Safety Commission reports annually to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment on enforcement activities under the 1974 Act. Its report for 1991-92 was published in December 1992. The Department has no plans at present to commission further information on compliance with health and safety legislation governing employment of children and young people.

Further provisions on the employment of children below the minimum school leaving age in England and Wales are contained in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Education Act 1944, which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Education. Enforcement of these provisions, and relevant local authority bye-laws, is primarily the responsibility of local education authorities.

All local authorities with responsibility for enforcement of legislation on children's employment were consulted recently by the Government in connection with the European Commission's proposals for a directive on protection of young people at work. The Government at present have no plans to commission further information on these matters.

Wages Councils

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 5 May, *Official Report*, column *136*, how many employers and employer bodies have made written representations on wages councils *(a)* for or *(b)* against abolition.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Since announcement of the Bill, we have received 140 representations from employers and employer bodies supporting abolition and 25 against.

Employment Exchange Staff

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will outline the incentive scheme for employment exchange staff and its relation to the number of people in employment; and what is the total of such payments for the Ilford office for the past year.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Michael Gapes, dated 25 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about the incentive scheme for employment exchange staff, its relation to the number of people in employment, and incentive payments made in the Ilford office in the last year. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

We do not operate an incentive scheme, and therefore no incentive payments were made last year to people working at Ilford Jobcentre. We do however make use of a Civil Service wide scheme which relates pay more generally with overall performance. In doing so, we are following the principles of the Citizen's Charter White Paper, which recognizes that the ways in which people are paid can have an effect on performance and that pay systems in the public sector need to make a regular and direct link between a person's contribution to the standards of service provided and their reward.

Our adoption of this approach is consistent with progress towards the more businesslike delivery of services in the public sector, which is also embodied in the Citizen's Charter White Paper. Our standards of service to clients are an important part of our overall performance. These have been clearly set out in the Jobseeker's Charter and are displayed with information about performance in local offices. The focus of the Jobseeker's Charter is standards of service, such as waiting times and the accurate and prompt payment of benefit to those who are entitled to receive it—and not target numbers.

Whilst our activities have some impact on overall employment levels, by mobilising the potential labour force into active jobsearch, their effect is diffuse and complex and so can only be estimated rather than measured. The number of people in employment is determined primarily by the strength of the economy.

I hope this is helpful.

As decided by the Administration Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the *Official Report*. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Protection of Employment Rights

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals she has to extend the protection of employment rights of those at work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, currently before Parliament, contains a number of important extensions to employment rights, including in relation to maternity, written particulars of employment, itemised pay statements, trade union membership and unfair dismissal.

Manufacturing Unit Costs

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the manufacturing unit wage costs in the three months to February; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The manufacturing unit wage and salary costs for the three months to February 1993 are:

	Unit costs
December 1992	130·3
January 1993	129·3
February 1993	128·8

These are index figures which relate to the base year of 1985. More up-to-date figures were published on 20 May. Comparing the three months ending March this year with the three months ending March 1992, manufacturing unit wage costs showed the largest percentage fall since records began in 1970.

Training for Work

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances training for work participants who wish to start their own business can try out their business idea in a period of enterprise rehearsal, and then take up support under the business start-up allowance; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The provision of enterprise training under training for work is determined by training and

enterprise councils (TECs). Training for work leavers are immediately eligible to be considered by TECs for support under the business start-up scheme.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if she will give the latest unemployment figures for *(a)* the west midlands and *(b)* Coventry, distinguishing the figures for (i) adults and (ii) women.

Mr. McLoughlin: In April 1993, the unadjusted level of claimant unemployment in the west midlands stood at 290,666, of whom 289,465 were aged 18 and over and 67,604 were women. The equivalent figures for Coventry local authority district were 20,846, 20,783, and 4,761 respectively.

Creches

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps her Department is taking to encourage employers to provide creche facilities in the west midlands.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department encourages employers throughout the country to adopt family-friendly employment policies including flexible working and help with childcare, through publications such as "The Best of Both Worlds". The new out-of-school child care grant, delivered by training and enterprise councils TECs, will create some 50,000 new child care places for school-aged children over the next three years. TECS in the west midlands will be playing their part in this initiative, with a variety of local initiatives to encourage employer involvement in child care.

New Jobs

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new jobs she estimates to have been created over the past 14 years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Between December 1978 and December 1992, there was a net fall of 322,000 in the work force in employment in the United Kingdom.

Travel-to-work Areas

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the timetable for her review of the travel-to-work areas; and when she expects to publish a new map.

Mr. McLoughlin: New travel-to-work area boundaries will be calculated using information on commuting patterns from the 1991 census of population special workplace statistics. These are due to be released by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys at the end of November this year. Revised travel-to-work areas, including maps, will be circulated for comment six to nine months after this date.

Defence Workers (South-west)

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action her Department is taking to facilitate the employment of those formerly working in Ministry of Defence establishments in Plymouth and the south-west of England.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Employment Service and training and enterprise councils deliver a wide range of employment, enterprise and training progammes to facilitate the employment prospects of unemployed people. These are available to all unemployed people, including those formerly working in the Ministry of Defence establishments in Plymouth and the south-west of England.

Economically Inactive People

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest figures of economically inactive people by *(a)* region and *(b)* the whole of the United Kingdom expressed both in numbers and as a percentage of their respective populations.

Mr. McLoughlin: The latest estimates—not seasonally adjusted—from the labour force survey are given in the following table:

Labour force survey (not seasonally adjusted)
Economically inactive people aged 16 and over

Region	*Number (thousands)*	*As percentage of total population aged 16 and over*
Autumn 1992		
South East	4,822	35·0
East Anglia	590	35·7
South West	1,412	37·5
West Midlands	1,518	36·9
East Midlands	1,140	35·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,453	37·2
North West	1,942	39·0
North	964	39·9
Wales	979	42·7
Scotland	1,510	37·9
Great Britain	16,331	37·0
Spring 1992		
Northern Ireland	460	40·0
United Kingdom	16,801	37·2

Unemployment Figures

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the figure initially given for the expected increase for unemployment for April 1993 for the purposes of seasonal adjustment at his Department's press briefing on the morning of 20 May; what revisions were subsequently made to this figure; and what were the reasons for the revision.

Mr. McLoughlin: A total of 2,165, which was a clerical error in the departmental press office's briefing pack, subsequently corrected at the same meeting to around "five thousand" (4,965). No re-estimation of seasonal factors was involved.

ENVIRONMENT

Office Stock

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent evaluation has been undertaken by his Department of methods of assessing the environmental merits of existing office stock.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State launched a scheme at the end of last

month specifically for the evaluation of the environmental performance of existing office buildings. This is run by the Building Research Establishment (BRE) under the title BREEAM. In due course, BRE will review the impact of the scheme. Property Holdings is committed to using BREEAM both in commissioning new buildings and appraisal of existing stock whenever major refurbishment is undertaken.

Air Conditioning Systems

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what technical guidance the Building Research Establishment has provided owners and operators of air conditioning systems to phase out CFC-dependent systems.

Mr. Maclean: Since 1989 the Building Research Establishment has published two information papers, two digests and eight journal articles and conference papers containing advice and guidance for owners and operators of air conditioning systems on the phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons. These publications, which are listed, address such issues as the availability of suitable alternative refrigerants, the conversion of existing CFC-based air conditioning systems to operate on alternative refrigerants, minimisation of CFC emissions from air conditioning systems, and the health and safety aspects of new refrigerants.

BRE Publications

BRE Information Paper IP23/89, 'CFCs and the building industry', November 1989.
BRE Digest 358, 'CFCs and buildings', February 1991.
BRE Digest 358 (new edition), 'CFCs in buildings', October 1992.
BRE Information Paper IP8/93, 'Phase-out of CFCs: guidance for owners and operators of air conditioning systems', April 1993.

Journal Articles:

'Meeting the challenge—CFCs and the building industry'. Urethanes Technology (The Polyurethane Industry's International Journal), February/March 1990.
'Ammonia as coolant'. Building Services, The CIBSE Journal, April 1990.
'Preparing for a future without CFCS'. BSEE (Building Services and Environmental Engineer), June 1990.
'Refrigeration—time to decide'. Building Services, The CIBSE Journal, December 1991.
'Air conditioning—alternatives to CFCs and HCFCs'. Property Journal (Journal of the British Property Federation), August 1992.

Conference Papers

'The global environmental impact of non-domestic buildings—possibilities for the future'. Presented at IMECHE conference CFCs—the engineering solution, South Bank Polytechnic, April 1990.
'Implications of the use of CFC alternatives on the building industry'. Presented at the CIBSE National Conference, Canterbury, April 1990.
"Summary of trials with new refrigerants in air conditioning systems'. Presented at the Institute of Refrigeration/IMECHE conference, CFC alternatives: user experience and update, London, November 1992.

Council Tax

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what estimate he has made of the average change in council tax bills which would result from a change of the single occupancy discount from 25 per cent. to 50 per cent.;

(2) what estimate he has made of the average change in council tax bills which would result from a change of the second home multiplier from 50 per cent. to 100 per cent.

Mr. Robin Squire: The changes described would not affect the average level of council tax bills, because local authorities would still require to collect the same amount of money overall from the same number of dwellings.

Partnerships for Change Conference

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he intends to take to ensure that the partnerships for change conference to be held in Manchester in September 1993 will include on its agenda adequate time for the discussion of third world debts, international trade, the policies of the World bank and the International Monetary Fund and other global economic issues.

Mr. Maclean: The partnerships for change conference will focus on the practical implementation of Agenda 21, mainly through case study presentations and workshops. Discussions are likely to cover financial and economic frameworks.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what criteria will be employed in the selection of organisations chosen to participate in the partnerships for change conference to be held in Manchester in September 1993.

Mr. Maclean: Participants in the partnerships for change conference will be drawn from business and industry, environment and development groups, local authorities and communities around the world. They will have practical experience of sustainable development problems and solutions. A small number of representatives of national Governments and international bodies will also be invited.

Environmental Issues

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will next meet the Association of County Councils to discuss environmental issues.

Mr. Maclean: I regularly discuss issues of common concern with the chairman of the Association of County Councils, together with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of District Councils, in the Central and Local Government Environment Forum. The next meeting of the forum is being planned for July.

Sustainable Development Strategy

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement outlining the means by which he proposes to involve Parliament in the consultation process relating to the drawing up of the first United Kingdom national sustainable development strategy.

Mr. Maclean: As the next stage in the preparation of a national sustainable development plan, my Department will be issuing a consultation paper in June. Copies of this document and a summary of the responses will be laid before the House in the normal way.

Energy Use Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to update the report "Energy Use in United Kingdom Manufacturing Industry up to the Year 2000", published in 1984.

Mr. Maclean: Aggregate projections of energy use in United Kingdom industry to 2020 are given in Energy Paper 59, published by the Department of Trade and Industry in 1992.

In addition, my Department is sponsoring an analysis of industrial energy use and greenhouse gas emissions based on an understanding of energy technologies. The methodology is comparable with that underlying energy use in United Kingdom manufacturing industry up to the year 2000 and we hope to start publishing the results, including projections to 2020 under a range of assumptions, in 1994.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show for each of the 20 largest housing associations the number of houses under management per employee.

Mr. Baldry: Housing associations provide a wide diversity of accommodation, from general family housing to homes for those with special needs, including sheltered homes for the elderly, and hostel accommodation for single homeless people. The ratio of employees to units managed varies according to the nature of the housing managed as well as the circumstances of the individual association. The latest figures available, taken from the annual statistical returns made to the Housing Corporation at 31 March 1992, for the largest 20 housing associations are as follows:

Housing association	*Total housing under management*	*Total bedspaces under management*	*Full time staff*	*Part time staff*
Notting Hill Housing Trust	9,197	621	268	72
Merseyside Improved Houses	14,806	853	416	196
The Royal British Legion Housing	11,993	24	519	727
Hanover Housing Association	8,637	0	526	271
Anchor Housing Association	22,380	1,726	2,380	2,945
Sanctuary Housing Association	11,491	789	432	217
Peabody	11,819	6	439	41
Circle Thirty Three Housing	7,053	1,343	201	61
Northern Counties Housing	11,168	24	401	162
The North British Housing	21,947	860	699	274
North Housing Association Ltd.	21,249	307	490	158
Broomleigh Housing Association	12,318	0	145	18
The Guinness Trust	10,335	197	373	117
The Sutton Housing Trust	14,259	0	396	149
London and Quadrant Housing Trust	13,628	1,737	303	12
Liverpool Housing Trust Ltd.	7,155	12	162	47
Bradford and Northern Housing	8,336	294	252	49
Focus Housing Association	7,524	601	347	54
Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing	7,308	0	134	22
Swale Housing Association	7,284	287	89	38

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs have been *(a)* created and *(b)* lost in each enterprise zone on an annual basis; and how many jobs were lost in the area of each enterprise zone in each of the two years before its creation.

Mr. Robin Squire: (a) The total stock of jobs in each enterprise zone for the years 1981 to 1989 is available from the publications: "Monitoring of Enterprise Zones, Year Two and Year Three Reports" and the annual reports "Enterprise Zone Information", available from the library. The data for 1990 are due to be published this summer.

(b) Data on jobs lost and gained annually in enterprise zones area are available only for 1981 to 1983 and are published in "Monitoring of Enterprise Zones, Year Two and Year Three Reports".

No data are available on the number of jobs lost in the area of each enterprise zone in the two years before its creation.

Housing

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the total amount of support given by his Department to *(a)* the Housing Corporation, *(b)* other housing funding, excluding local authority credit approvals/capital allocations in (i) England, (ii) Greater London and (iii) the south-east, excluding Greater London, for each year from 1982-83 to 1992-93, estimated, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure.

Sir George Young: The table gives figures for the main areas of spending other than local authority capital, which also includes support to renovation grants for the private sector and housing defects expenditure. Figures for other housing programmes—including rent officers, rent assessment panels, homelessness revenue grants, housing mobility, home improvement agencies, housing research, estate action revenue, grants etc.—are either not broken down by region, or are not available on a regional basis other than at disproportionate cost. Further housing outputs are also funded through expenditure under the urban block, providing over 5,000 new units this year, and improving many more.

	Housing revenue account subsidy		Housing corporation ADP	Housing action trusts
1982-83				
London	341·7		—	—
South-East	31·6		—	—
England	438·2		755	—
1983-84				
London	309·99		—	—
South-East	17·9		—	—
England	349·9		743	—
1984-85				
London	333·4		—	—
South-East	18·9		—	—
England	381·9		697	—
1985-86				
London	399·0		—	—
South-East	27·9		—	—
England	494·4		711	—
1986-87				
London	383·3		—	—
South-East	23·8		—	—
England	472·3		715	—
1987-88				
London	353·5		—	—
South-East	21·7		—	—
England	437·5		752	—
1988-89				
London	456·2		—	—
South-East	26·3		—	—
England	548·4		777	—
1989-90				
London	546·9		—	—
South-East	37·4		—	—
England	653·8		935	—
1990-91				
London	836·1	[1](512·2)	[2]422	—
South-East	53·4	(296·1)		
England	1,232·5	(2,339·4)	1,063	—
1991-92				
London	807·5	(677·3)	827	0·3
South-East	32·9	(330·7)		
England	1,106·4	(2,705·8)	1,586	10·1
1992-93				
London	760·6	(743·0)	1,218	11·8
South-East	17·1	(323·6)		
England	1,043·0	(2,884·1)	2,370	26·5

[1] Figures from 1989-90 represent the housing element of Housing Revenue Account Subsidy only. The figures in brackets show the rent rebate element (the equivalent figures were previously part of DSS programmes).

[2] Housing Corporation expenditure broken down by its regions is only available from 1990-91. The figure shown in the table for London and the South-East combined represents the total for the Housing Corporation's London and Home Counties (NE), London and Home Counties (NW) and London and Home Counties (S) regions.

Legislation Timetable

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has, and under what timetable, to introduce legislation *(a)* to create an environmental protection agency, *(b)* to change administrative arrangements for national parks, and *(c)* to implement the provisions of the EC habitats directive.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* My Department is continuing to work for the early creation of the environment agency and to change the administrative arrangements for national parks. The required legislation will be introduced as soon as the necessary parliamentary time can be found. The Government intend to meet the timetable specified by the directive for any necessary transposition of its requirements into domestic legislation.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a statement on his legislative plans for new local government authorities.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The Secretary of State may give effect to the Local Government Commission's recommendations by order under the Local Government Act 1992. The timing of each order is dependent on the commission's work programme and its recommendations.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department takes to encourage research and development in joint heat and power initiatives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government fully recognise the energy and environmental benefits of combined heat and power (CHP) and seek to ensure that the technology faces no unnecessary legislative or institutional barriers to its implementation. The Energy Efficiency Office promotes the wider use of the technology in all suitable applications and is working towards the target set by the Government in 1990 of doubling the present installed CHP capacity to 4000 MW by the year 2000. The best practice programme contains an element by which up to 49 per cent. support may be given to pre-competitive research under which CHP is supported.

Local Government Commission

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy on the independence of the Local Government Commission and the weight to be given to its recommendations.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Local Government Commission is an independent, non-departmental public body. It is required to have regard to the policy and procedure guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Once the commission submits its final report to the Secretary of State, he may, by order, give effect to all or any of the recommendations, with or without modifications.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will give details of the number of people in England exempted from payment of the community charge on the grounds of severe mental impairment in each year of its existence;

(2) what is his Department's assessment of the number of people in England who *(a)* will be in receipt of 100 per cent. council tax benefit for the property element of the tax and *(b)* will be exempt from payment of the personal element of the council tax on the grounds of severe mental impairment;

(3) what is his Department's forecast of the number of people in England who were previously exempted from paying the community charge on the grounds of severe mental impairment and who *(a)* are liable for the water charge element of the council tax, *(b)* are liable for all or part of the property element of the council tax or *(c)* will be in receipt of 100 per cent. council tax benefit for the property element.

Mr. Robin Squire: Some 97,000 people were exempt from the personal community charge as of 1 June 1990 on the grounds of severe mental impairment. Figures for later years of the community charge are not available.

My Department does not collect information on the numbers of people with a severe mental impairment who are liable for the council tax, or who give rise to a discount, or who receive council tax benefit. Because, however, the council tax is a tax on dwellings, fewer people will be liable than was the case under the community charge. Water charges are not collected with the council tax in England.

Environmental Statistics

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish this year's "Digest of Environmental Statistics".

Mr. Maclean: The 15th edition of the annual "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics" will be published on 27 May 1993. Copies will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Radioactive Discharges

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the impact of British Nuclear Fuels' new radioactive discharge applications for the Sellafield area on levels of discharges of radioactive pollution around the United Kingdom coastline.

Mr. Curry: I have been asked to reply.

Detailed assessment of those members of the public who would potentially be the most exposed to radiation from the proposed discharges to the marine environment has confirmed that their doses would be well within nationally and internationally recommended limits and much less than doses from natural sources. It follows that the doses to the rest of the United Kingdom population would be even smaller. Full details of their assessment were included in an explanatory memorandum which accompanied the draft authorisations issued for public consultation on 16 November 1992. A copy of these documents is in the Library.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Widows' Bereavement Allowance

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend widows' bereavement allowance to include men; and if he will make a statement on the application of section 51A of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

Mr. Dorrell: There are no plans at present to extend the widows' bereavement allowance to widowers. Section 51A of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 has no application to the question whether widows' bereavement allowance should be extended to widowers.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to treat mortgage interest tax relief as official Government expenditure.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to change the accounting treatment of mortgage interest tax relief.

Civil Service Pension Scheme

Mr. Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to amend the civil service pension schemes to include as pensionable service years served by new entrants joining the service as temporary staff during the second world war, in cases where those staff became established after the war;

(2) what would be the cost of counting as pensionable all war time service by civil servants entering the service during the second world war who became established after the end of the war;

(3) what representations he has received on the pension arrangements applying to war-time service by home civil servants.

Mr. Portillo: I have no plans to amend the civil service pension scheme to allow unestablished service given before 14 July 1949, including that of temporary staff recruited during the war, to reckon in full for pension purposes. I have received no recent representations specifically about temporary staff, but do from time to time receive correspondence about unestablished service generally.

The most recent available estimate of costs is that, even if pre-July 1949 unestablished service were to count in full in the calculation of pension benefits only, both past and future lump sums being left out of the account, the total cost over the next 25 years for the civil service alone would be of the order of £400 million.

Empty Properties

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many empty properties in the owner-occupied sector have been bought under the scheme outlined in the autumn statement by housing associations in each standard United Kingdom region; and how many such properties were repossessed homes in each instance.

Mr. Portillo: The information for England is provided in the following table:

	Completed units	*Repossessed units*
Northern	584	25
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,376	89
East Midlands	1,376	104
East Anglia	801	33
South East	9,083	547
South West	1,533	127
West Midlands	1,583	62
North West	2,094	151
National Total	18,430	1,138

In Scotland 209 were purchased; none was a repossession.

In Wales a total of 1,198 properties were purchased, of which 95 were repossessions.

In Northern Ireland 743 empty properties were purchased of which:

141 were by Northern Ireland Housing Executive;

276 were by Northern Ireland Co-Ownership housing association and;

326 were by other housing associations.

Regional breakdowns for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and repossession figures for Northern Ireland, are not available centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. All the above figures are provisional at this stage and subject to normal end-year checking which may result in marginal adjustments to the final outturn.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to extend the housing market package for the purpose of purchasing empty properties to cover the whole of the 1993-94 financial year.

Mr. Portillo: No; as my right hon. Friend said in his autumn statement last November, the housing market package was a time-limited measure, explicitly aimed at the overhang of empty properties in the over-occupied sector which was holding back activity in the housing market. The purchase of over 23,000 properties has achieved its desired result by providing a significant stimulus to activity.

Relocation

Mr. Moss: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the costs to the public funds of the relocation of Government employees by Government Departments over the past five years.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not held centrally.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will propose the introduction of a reduced rate of VAT on fuel for occupiers of public sector properties which are proven to be *(a)* difficult to heat and *(b)* located in areas in which it is colder than the British average climate.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider a reduced rate of VAT on fuel for occupiers of public sector properties which are proven to be *(a)* difficult to heat and *(b)* in a climate colder than the British average.

Sir John Cope: No. Differential VAT treatment for different sectors and areas would be difficult to administer and would undermine the revenue and environmental objects of the Government's VAT charges on fuel and power. In so far as fuel and power supplies to some public sector properties are already subject to the standard rate of VAT, this proposal would also contravene agreements with our EC partners.

Crossrail

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those organisations and companies, other than the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance, from which he has received recent representations concerning the crossrail project.

Mr. Portillo: We have received representations in recent weeks from the following organisations and companies:

The Corporation of the City of London
London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau
NFC plc
Regalian Group
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Trafalgar House Developments Ltd.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Channon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change the structure of the responsibilities of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Sir John Cope: We have no plans to change the present structure of responsibilities of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Public Employees' Pay

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the groups of public employees that have reached pay settlements on their pay round since the autumn statement; and on what dates those settlements were reached.

Mr. Portillo: Settlements have been reached in respect of the following groups:

Group	*Date settlement agreed*	*Operate date of settlement*
Royal Mail middle and junior managers	15 March 1993	1 January 1993
Armed Forces	12 February 1993	1 April
NHS doctors and dentists	25 March 1993	1 April 1993
School teachers (England and Wales)	1 April 1993	1 April 1993
Civil service clerical and secretarial staff	26 April 1993	1 April 1993
Civil service executive and support staff	26 March 1993	1 April 1993
Teachers in Scotland	29 March 1993	1 April 1993

Settlements have also been reached for a number of smaller groups.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the earnings of those public employees on top salaries as defined by the Pay Board Review Body by scale and group in real terms at January 1993 prices for each year since 1990-91; and if he will provide estimates for 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mr. Portillo: Data on earnings, where this differs from the salaries and scales down, are not available. It is not possible to make estimates of pay rates beyond the current year. The other information requested is shown in the table.

Rates of pay at 1 April each year, at 1 January 1993 prices

Grade	*1990*		*1991*		*1992*[2]		*1993*		*Staff in post March 1992*[1]
Home civil service									
Hd of HCS	104,577		106,642		108,234		109,931		1
PS/HMT	97,864		99,680		101,259		102,846		1
Grade 1	84,129		85,765		87,052		88,417		23
Grade 1A	77,118		78,803		80,077		81,333		11
Grade 2	FR 58,886		MIN 61,148		MIN 62,099		MIN 63,072		
	DP 62,744		—		—		—		140
	DP 66,018		—		—		—		
	DP 69,876		MAX 71,613		MAX 72,741		MAX 73,881		
Grade 3	London[2]	National	London	National	London	National	London	National	
	FR 47,785	FR 47,785	MIN 50,125	MIN 48,788	MIN 50,940	MIN 49,596	MIN 51,738	MIN 50,374	
	DP 52,570	DP 50,365	—	—	—	—	—	—	481
	DP 55,248	DP 53,044	—	—	—	—	—	—	
	DP 57,828	DP 55,623	MAX 58,030	MAX 56,693	MAX 58,896	MAX 57,552	MAX 59,819	MAX 58,454	
Military									
RANK									
Admiral of the Fleet Field Marshal Marshal of the RAF	104,577		106,661		108,234		109,931		1
Admiral General Air Chief Marshal	84,130		85,786		87,050		88,416		21
Vice Admiral Lieutenant General Air Marshal	58,891		61,593		62,615		63,597		34
Rear Admiral Major General Air Vice Marshal	50,362		53,979		54,761		55,621		139
Judiciary									
Group 1[3]	104,577		106,663		108,234		109,931		1
Group 2	96,673		98,582		100,226		101,797		13
3[4]	92,870		94,696		96,093		97,599		39
4	84,107		85,786		87,052		88,417		107
5	62,391		70,867		75,686		76,873		26
	—		—		63,699		64,646		—
6	56,218		59,107		—		—		616
	—		—		76,126		68,079		—
7	46,022		52,321		52,179		52,997		478

Notes:
FR—Flat rate.
DP—Discretionary point.
[1] Numbers in post exclude the Northern Ireland Civil Service.
[2] Excludes London allowance of £2,000 (two star officers in the armed forces receive London pay and group 7 of the judicial salary structure receive London Weighting).
[3] The composition of each group is given in Appendix H to the 15th Report on Top Salaries Cm 2015 July 1992.
[4] The Lord Justice Clerk is paid a salary lead of £1,000.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those groups of public employees that have received pay offers in their latest pay round of less than 1·5 per cent., and if he will list those groups of public employees that have had offers of zero per cent.

Mr. Portillo: Negotiations and offers in respect of individual groups of public sector employees are confidential to the parties directly concerned.

Oil Exploration

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written representations he has received since 16 March seeking changes to the transitional arrangements for the abolition of exploration and appraisal relief which he announced in the Budget.

Mr. Dorrell: There have been a number of written representations on the transitional arrangements, both seeking changes and supporting the existing Finance Bill measures.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies and industry associations have met him or ministerial colleagues since 16 March to seek changes to the transitional arrangements for the abolition of exploration and appraisal relief which he announced in the Budget; and if he will list them.

Mr. Dorrell: Ministers have met a range of companies, industry associations and other interested parties who have put forward a variety of views on the transitional arrangements.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all companies and industry associations which have made representations to Her Majesty's Treasury since 16 March seeking changes to the transitional arrangements for the abolition of exploration and appraisal relief which he announced in the Budget.

Mr. Dorrell: Those companies and industry associations that have made representations and have yet to make them public are free to do so.

Securities and Investments Board

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has received the report of the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board following his review of the Financial Services Act 1986.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the Securities and Investments Board report which he asked for following the loss of Maxwell pension funds.

Mr. Lamont: The Maxwell affair—and in particular, the weaknesses identified in the supervision of the Maxwell companies—revealed a number of important shortcomings in the way that financial regulation had been conducted under the Financial Services Act. Accordingly, on 9 July last year, at columns 292 and 293, I informed the House that I had asked Andrew Large, the new chairman of the Securities and Investments Board (SIB), to conduct his own review of how SIB carries out its regulatory responsibilities, with a view to strengthening the implementation of regulatory standards in practice. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security had previously announced, on 8 June, at columns 19-21, that he has set up for the Pension Law Review Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Goode to carry out a review of the framework of law and regulation for occupational pension schemes.

Andrew Large has now presented his review. It is published today and I am placing a copy in the Library of the House. It is a thorough and professional analysis, drawing on a wide-ranging consultative exercise with providers, users and regulators of financial services, both in the United Kingdom and in other countries. I am grateful to Mr. Large and I accept his conclusions. The Government will give full support to the implementation of his recommendations. The result will be a significant improvement in investor protection—the primary objectives of any system of financial regulation.

Effective investor protection can be delivered by a range of regulatory structures. The two-tier structure laid down in the Financial Services Act—statutory-based regulation with a strong practitioner input—is not the only option. The review also looked at a unitary—fully statutory—system, but concluded that the case has not been made for taking such an extreme step at this stage. The Government accept this conclusion—another major upheavel with all its associated costs would be unwelcome both to firms and to investors, especially as the assumed benefits of a different structure are far from guaranteed.

But while the existing two-tier regulatory structure should be retained, investors have every right to expect effective delivery. To this end, the changes proposed by Andrew Large are significant and radical, yet evolutionary. In its early years, SIB was right to concentrate on establishing a code of regulations. But rules, regulations and procedures are only as valuable as the diligence and skill with which they are implemented. It is now time to focus on supervision and enforcement to see that appropriate standards are delivered.

We need regulation designed to protect investors, to catch and punish fraudsters and to tackle sharp practice; while at the same time paying due attention to the costs to firms and to investors of operating the system. The review tackles head on the cost of regulation and signals a determination, including through direct control of SIB's resources and the setting up of a cost of compliance unit, to look at the justification of all regulatory costs. I welcome Andrew Large's proposals which should deliver increasing cost effectiveness hand in hand with effective regulation.

Reshaping regulatory effort in this way will require a partnership between SIB and all the bodies recognised under the Act. Each self-regulatory organisation, recognised investment exchange and recognised professional body has its separate and essential role to play. But the system must be driven and led by SIB as regulator of the regulators with a more active style of regulation, supervision and enforcement. I fully support the approach Andrew Large has recommended; SIB must set the standards expected of the front line regulators, supervise their delivery and ensure their enforcement. SIB's role and standing will be enhanced by its proposals for greater openness, cost effectiveness and public accountability giving investors and providers more confidence in the system.

Change is already in hand at Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, as foreshadowed in my statement of 9 July. SIB has been working with IMRO to rectify serious weaknesses in six main areas. A risk-based approach to monitoring has been developed to sharpen its focus and effectiveness, together with a significant increase in monitoring resources. There are new procedures for co-ordinating emergency cases and improvements to IMRO's admission procedures. New occupational pension scheme rules came into force in March and a revised code of practice of board members' interests was introduced in August. With the appointment of a new chairman and chief executive, these measures represent a vigourous response to the regulatory weaknesses at SIB and IMRO exposed by the Maxwell affair.

Improved investor protection will require full use of SIB's extensive powers, including the inherent powers derived from its powers to recognise the front-line regulators. Andrew Large believes that he will be able to achieve the major changes required within the current legislation. But in a number of areas he has indicated that if, despite expectations, SIB's powers prove inadequate to secure the required standards of investor protection when put fully to the test, he will not hesitate to seek legislative amendment.

I share the view that full use of SIB's powers should deliver the required improvements. The chairman of SIB has the Government's full backing in the use of these powers. I will, of course, keep this area under review and I will be prepared to take whatever action is necessary if experience shows existing powers to be inadequate. But such a development would be serious indeed because it would indicate that the co-operation needed between SIB and the front-line regulators to make the two-tier structure work effectively had not materialised.

I have asked the chairman of SIB to implement the recommendations of the review, in co-operation with the recognised bodies, and to keep me closely in touch with progress on implementation. As part of its plans for greater openness, cost effectiveness and public accountability, SIB will publish six monthly progress bulletins.

No regulator and no system of regulation an guarantee that all fraud will be prevented or identified. Nor can regulation replace the duty on investors to consider

carefully how they invest their money. But the Government are determined that all the lessons of the Maxwell affair must be fully learnt.

Financial Services Act 1986

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to bring forward proposals to repeal or reform the Financial Services Act 1986; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what reviews Her Majesty's Government are conducting of the working of the Financial Services Act 1986; and for what purpose.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* I have no plans to change the present statutory framework. On 9 July last year, following publication of the summary of conclusions and findings of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation's review of its regulation of Maxwell companies and the Securities and Investments Board's own assessment, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer asked Andrew Large, SIB's chairman, to conduct a review of how the SIB carries out its regulatory responsibilities. My right hon. Friend's answer today to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) reports on the delivery of the review.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the working of the Financial Services Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* I received a number of such representations.

British Telecom

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the administrative costs of the 1993-94 sale of shares in British Telecom plc borne by class XVII, vote 1 of the March 1993 Supply estimates.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The administrative costs related to the 1993 sale of shares in British Telecommunications plc borne on class XVII, vote 1 in 1993-94 is estimated at £200,000.

Insurance Policies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which regulatory organisation controls the sale, in sterling, of United Kingdom insurance policies to *(a)* United Kingdom citizens located overseas and *(b)* those serving in British armed forces overseas where the claims are processed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* In general, any direct controls on the sale of insurance policies are likely to be the responsibility of the authorities in the country where the policy is sold. However, the rules of the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation apply in certain circumstances to the sale to United Kingdom citizens—including armed forces personnel—located overseas, of investment-based life insurance policies by life offices based in the United Kingdom.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animals (Transport and Slaughter)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to review current practices of procedure concerning the transport and slaughter of animals within the European Community.

Mr. Soames: Directive 91/628 lays down conditions for the transport of animals within the Community. The Commission is due to propose further detailed rules, and we are pressing it to come forward with proposals for discussion as soon as possible.

The United Kingdom initiated discussions on EC proposals on the welfare of animals at slaughter during our presidency. Discussions are continuing and we will be seeking high welfare standards to be implemented and enforced throughout the Community.

Integrated Administration and Control Systems

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many IACS forms his Department have returned to farmers because they were incorrectly completed; and how many completed IACS forms were returned to his Department as a percentage of those sent out.

Mr. Curry: Regional service centres are now undertaking detailed checks of the IACS forms, but figures are not available on the number where further information may be required to determine eligibility for aid.

In order to ensure that every potential applicant received an information pack, my Department distributed IACS forms and explanatory booklets to all major and minor holdings on our records, comprising some 190,000 in England. We recognised that some of these would not be eligible but we were not willing to take the risk of missing any potential claimants. Of the forms distributed, 45 per cent. have been completed and returned.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many IACS applications were received in the United Kingdom by 15 May.

Mr. Gummer: The number of applications received in the United Kingdom by 15 May was 157,129.

Local Authority Farmland

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of *(a)* the number of farms and *(b)* the total acreage of farmland that is owned by local authorities; and in which counties these areas are mainly concentrated.

Mr. Curry: The Department does not have this information. However, information on statutory small-holdings owned by local authorities is contained in the annual reports to Parliament on smallholdings in England and Wales which are available in the Library.

European Agricultural Advisory Committees

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom representation on the European agricultural advisory committees for *(a)* the oil and fats

sector, *(b)* the fresh and processed fruit and vegetable committee and *(c)* social questions affecting farmers and members of their families; and what assessment has been made of the reasons for the difference in the United Kingdom level relative to other large EC countries.

Mr. Curry: Members of agricultural advisory committees are appointed by the European Commission on the basis of information supplied by trade and professional bodies. Their role is to advise the Commission on its work in the various agricultural sectors. National Governments are not involved in these appointments in any way.

Geographical Information Systems

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on geographical information systems used by his Department.

Mr. Curry: Geographical information systems using a variety of software products are currently employed by a number of divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including emergencies and food protection, environmental protection, plant health and seeds inspectorate, fisheries, and marine environmental protection. Additional systems are used by its agencies, including the Central Science Laboratory, the Central Veterinary Laboratory and ADAS.

Beef Premium Scheme

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the present beef premium scheme will be reviewed in 12 months' time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We have already started to look at the details of the operation of the new beef special premium scheme with industry representatives.

EC Agri-environment Package

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about *(a)* the amount of money that each EC member state is expecting to spend on the agri-environment package in each of the next three years and *(b)* what schemes they intend to introduce; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: In the United Kingdom we expect to spend £45·5 million in 1993-94, £75·5 million in 1994-95 and £97 million in 1995-96 on environmentally sensitive areas, moorland schemes, the creation and improvement of a range of wildlife habitats over a 20-year period, organic farming, the encouragement of new public access on set-aside land and measures to protect groundwater catchments affected by high nitrate levels. This is in addition to expenditure on such schemes as countryside stewardship.

Other member states are currently preparing their plans and the final contents are as yet unclear. So far, programmes for some parts of some member states have been submitted to the EC Commission but provisional details of only two national programmes have been made available. These are a French programme to encourage maintenance of extensive grazed pasture with forecast expenditure of FF630 million in 1993, FF1,050 million in 1994 and FF1,575 million in 1995, and a Dutch programme to extend their environmentally sensitive areas by 9,000 hectares, for which we do not yet have details of the cost.

WALES

Field Identification

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what method he intends to verify the information with respect to field identification numbers and areas submitted by individual farmers in form IACS 2A (1993): and who will carry out the verification.

Mr. David Hunt: Verification of the information submitted on form IACS 2A (1993) will be carried out by Welsh Office staff by means of a combination of administrative checks and site inspection visits.

Trainees

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the number of young females who have had their youth training placements terminated in Wales in each year from 1987; and how many such terminations resulted directly from a trainee becoming pregnant.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The following table shows the percentage of young women who left youth training places prior to completion of their training in each of the financial years 1987-88 to 1991-92. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available.

Information on the number who terminated training directly as a result of pregnancy is not available.

Youth Training
Young Women leavers in Wales

Year	*Completers Per cent.*	*Early leavers Per cent.*	*Don't know Per cent.*
1987-88	21	79	—
1988-89	26	74	—
1989-90	27	73	—
1990-91	28	54	[1]18
1991-92	27	53	21

[1]Figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are taken from the YT leavers survey and are not directly comparable with those for earlier years which were taken from the trainee database.

Agri-environment Scheme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action has been taken to date by his Department to implement European Community Regulation No. 2978/92 on the development of a multinational zonal agri-environment scheme for Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 17 May 1993 at column *55*.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to extend agri-environmental schemes currently operational in Wales to cover the Ceredigion area.

Mr. David Hunt: The Cambrian mountains—original and extension—environmentally sensitive areas (ESAs)

already cover part of Ceredigion. I have no plans to extend the boundaries of these ESAs. Other schemes containing agri-environmental elements, such as the farm woodland premium scheme, the farm and conservation grant scheme and hedgerow renovation scheme, are already available in Ceredigion.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the proportion of secondary school children in each local education authority area in Wales who have taken illegal drugs.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A 1992 survey by the Health Promotion Authority for Wales reported that 36·6 per cent. of all fifth formers had used some form of drug or other substance, excluding alcohol and tobacco, during that year. That data broken down to local education authority level are too small to be significant.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the subject of non-departmental public bodies over the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The activities of non-departmental public bodies relate to many areas of my Department's work and thus the imprecise information requested is not available centrally.

Grant-maintained schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many grant-maintained schools have facilities for disabled students: and what percentage this is of grant-maintained schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: All but one of the seven grant-maintained schools currently in Wales have some facilities for disabled students.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all of the successful capital grant requests from grant-maintained schools since he began making them, stating the work to be carried out and its value; and how many of these projects enabled disabled students to have access to these schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Details of the successful named projects in 1992-93 were provided in my right hon. Friend's reply of 1 February 1993 to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) *Official Report*, column *29*. An announcement about the 1993-94 allocations will be made shortly.

A number of the projects included the improvement of facilities for disabled students.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the firms in Clwyd that accepted regional enterprise grants in each year in which they were available and the amount of each grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Details about individual companies accepting offers of regional enterprise grants are commercially confidential. However, the following table gives the total number and value of offers accepted by companies in Clwyd for each year since the start of the scheme on 1 April 1988.

	Type of grant			
	Investment		*Innovation*	
	Number	*Offer value (£)*	*Number*	*Offer value (£)*
1988-89	41	322,534	10	227,750
1989-90	105	894,996	15	322,384
1990-91	67	616,778	23	498,074
1991-92	47	476,112	16	347,632
1992-93	27	253,839	20	450,092
Total	287	2,564,259	84	1,845,932

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the firms in Clwyd that accepted offers of regional selective assistance in 1991-92 and 1992-93 and the amount of each offer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Details of all offers of regional selective assistance of £75,000 or more are published in the *Employment Gazette* following the first payment of grant. These details remain commercially confidential until that time including individual amounts of RSA associated with projects which have been publicly announced beforehand. Companies accepting offers of RSA in 1991-92 whose details have appeared in the *Employment Gazette* are:

	RSA Offer (£)
Processed Timber Products Ltd.	75,000
Keating Gravure Systems (UK) Ltd.	100,000
Kronospan Ltd.	3,000,000
P. and R. Graphics	100,000
Fibrax Ltd.	125,000
Betts and Co.	600,000

Cardiff Bay Development

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the effect on the south Wales economy of the construction of the Cardiff bay development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest economic appraisal estimates that the Cardiff Bay regeneration strategy, including the barrage, will attract some 23,000 new jobs and £1·2 billion of private sector investment to Cardiff bay. The wider south Wales economy will clearly benefit from activity of this magnitude, in terms of both additional jobs and changed perceptions of the region in the eyes of inward investors.

Power Stations

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what effect he expects the Hamilton Oil and Connah's Quay power station projects will have on the north Wales economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that the Hamilton Point of Ayr terminal and PowerGen's Connah's Quay power station projects together represent an investment of some £1·8 billion. Up to 2,400 jobs will be created during construction, with around 110 permanent jobs at the two sites thereafter.

Management Placement Training

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have found full-time positions after completing management placement training courses in Wales in each year since 1987.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the numbers of people who have found full-time positions after completing management placement training courses in Wales is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of *(a)* grant in aid and *(b)* other moneys given by his Department to the Welsh Development Agency in 1991-92 and 1992-93 expressed in (i) cash prices and (ii) at 1990-91 prices.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is set out in the following table:

	Total grant in aid cash £000	*Total grant in aid at 1990-91 prices £000*
1991-92	87,167	76,116
1992-93	78,359	68,425

No other resources were made available by the Department in this period.

Trade Missions

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the destinations of the trade missions being organised by the Welsh Office over the next three years to promote the products of small and medium-sized enterprises based in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The programme of missions for 1993-94 is as follows:

1993-94	*Date*
1. GERMANY AND SWITZERLAND Stuttgart/Zurich	6-11 June 1993
2. SINGAPORE AND MALAYSIA Singapore/Kuala Lumpur	14-26 August 1993
3. USA AND CANADA Seattle/Vancouver/Toronto	11-23 September 1993
4. ARABIAN GULF Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia	1-14 October 1993
5. BELGIUM Brussels	14-18 February 1994
6. SPAIN AND FRANCE Barcelona/Marseilles	13-18 March 1994

The programmes for the eight 1994-95 and 10 1995-96 missions have yet to be finalised. Decisions on likely target markets are made taking account of the most up-to-date information available and both programmes are under review. For 1994-95, however, the programme is likely to include destinations in North America, the middle and far east, Australasia and Europe and I will make an announcement shortly.

Inward Investment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage share of foreign inward capital investment by county in Wales in each year since 1987.

Mr. David Hunt: The percentage share of capital investment promised by inward investment projects from overseas recorded since 1987 is shown in the following table. The figures are based on information provided at the time the projects were recorded and have not been amended to take account of any subsequent development.

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Clwyd	17·56	38·21	47·00	10·90	5·94
Dyfed	1·44	10·91	1·92	8·96	7·86
Gwent	4·47	6·84	2·43	16·27	12·33
Gwynedd	2·96	—	—	1·91	1·96
Powys	—	0·07	0·10	0·86	7·17
Mid Glamorgan	2·57	9·01	21·97	28·46	44·56
South Glamorgan	69·55	31·41	6·11	28·62	17·93
West Glamorgan	1·45	3·55	20·47	4·02	2·25

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new inward investment projects were secured by county in Wales in each year from 1988; how many new jobs were created; how many jobs were safeguarded; and what was the total capital investment.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is shown in the following table. The figures are based on information provided by the companies at the time the projects were recorded and have not been amended to take account of any subsequent developments.

Inward investment projects secured in Wales from 1988

County	*Number of projects*	*Number of jobs New*	*Number of jobs Safeguarded*	*Capital investment £ million*
1988				
Clwyd	28	2,377	26	201·0
Dyfed	6	253	0	20·0
Gwent	21	2,122	1,299	80·0
Gwynedd	7	377	110	34·0
Powys	0	0	0	0·0
Mid Glamorgan	20	1,742	200	43·0
South Glamorgan	7	3,773	730	764·0
West Glamorgan	8	649	30	15·0
1989				

County	Number of projects	Number of jobs New	Number of jobs Safeguarded	Capital investment £ million
Clwyd	14	831	0	190·0
Dyfed	10	448	2,280	70·0
Gwent	23	1,490	185	49·0
Gwynedd	2	18	0	0·3
Powys	2	35	0	0·5
Mid Glamorgan	19	1,051	87	52·0
South Glamorgan	15	2,140	94	155·0
West Glamorgan	15	1,163	700	24·0
1990				
Clwyd	38	2,204	238	235·0
Dyfed	4	0	948	8·0
Gwent	21	1,131	212	107·0
Gwynedd	3	123	0	0·4
Powys	2	42	0	0·5
Mid Glamorgan	33	1,147	3,670	97·0
South Glamorgan	24	2,273	350	137·0
West Glamorgan	17	1,036	2,510	84·0
1991				
Clwyd	48	2,412	640	121·0
Dyfed	8	330	960	70·0
Gwent	45	2,177	1,771	129·0
Gwynedd	15	573	1,006	69·0
Powys	3	120	0	6·0
Mid Glamorgan	31	2,890	1,815	220·0
South Glamorgan	21	792	518	216·0
West Glamorgan	12	844	212	33·0
1992				
Clwyd	38	1,496	548	83·0
Dyfed	15	185	875	68·0
Gwent	40	1,302	2,043	129·0
Gwynedd	27	735	593	35·0
Powys	34	1,052	0	66·0
Mid Glamorgan	25	1,062	1,726	392·0
South Glamorgan	18	654	999	160·0
West Glamorgan	9	131	969	62·0

Consultancy Initiatives

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many firms in Clwyd have been helped by consultancy initiatives in each year since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of firms which have received completed consultancies under the scheme in Clwyd are as follows:

	Number
1988-89	[1]24
1989-90	[1]96
1990-91	[1]113
1991-92	[1]149
1992-93	[1]140
1993-94	[2]9
TOTAL	531

[1] Completed.
[2] Completed to date.

These consultancy services are provided by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade and delivered in Wales on his behalf by the Welsh Development Agency.

The scheme, as my right hon. Friend announced on 10 March, *Official Report*, columns *583-84*, will continue at reduced rates of subsidy. This will allow the development of a new, wider and more flexible package of support which will help a larger number of companies, within the available resources. This new package of assistance, which will still include consultancy support, will continue after 31 March 1994, when the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme was due to end.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many inquiries TEC-operated business information services received from businesses in Clwyd last year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information about the numbers of inquiries received by TEC business information services is collected only on a TEC area basis. North East Wales TEC, which covers Clwyd with the exception of the boroughs of Colwyn and Rhuddlan, dealt with 1,866 inquiries through its business information service last year. The total number of inquiries received in Gwynedd and Clwyd during the same period was 5,635.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new and existing small businesses in Clwyd participated in counselling sessions run by TECs last year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information about the numbers of new and existing small businesses participating in counselling sessions run by TECs is collected only on a TEC area basis. North East Wales TEC, which covers

Clwyd with the exception of Colwyn and Rhuddlan boroughs, undertook 863 counselling sessions in 1992-93. The total number of counselling sessions undertaken in Gwynedd and Clwyd for the same period was 3,040.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many owners and managers of businesses in Clwyd received help and training from TECs last year; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the numbers of owners and managers of businesses in Clwyd who received help and training from TECs last year is available only on a TEC area basis. NE Wales TEC, which covers Clwyd with the exception of Colwyn and Rhuddlan boroughs, supported 876 owner-manager training activities in 1992-93. The total number of owner-manager training activities undertaken in Gwynedd and Clwyd for the same period was 2,289.

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Clwyd who started their own businesses in the last financial year received help and support from TECs; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the numbers of people who started their own businesses in the last financial year and who received help and support from TECs is collected only on a TEC area basis. North East Wales TEC, which covers Clwyd with the exception of the boroughs of Colwyn and Rhuddlan, provided help and support for 171 people who started their own businesses in 1992-93. The total number who received such assistance in Gwynedd and Clwyd during the same period was 578.

Small Firms (Awards)

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the companies in Clwyd that have received a small firms merit award for research and technology *(a)* stage 1 and *(b)* stage 2 award during the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Government's SMART competition for small companies and start-ups is a highly successful scheme that provides support for innovation which is widely recognised as the key to company competitiveness. Over the five years that it has been operating, Wales has received 112 awards covering a wide technological range, representing 9 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. The following companies located in Clwyd have received awards over the past 12 months:

(a) STAGE 1
Global Specialties (UK) Ltd.
Optokem Instruments Ltd.

(b) STAGE 2
Henrob Ltd.
Quest Refrigeration Ltd.

Some 107 applications from Welsh companies have been received for this year's stage 1 competition, representing a 55 per cent. increase on last year. This reflects an increase in confidence in Welsh industry as well as a positive interest in innovation.

Foreign-owned Manufacturing Units

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the percentage share of employment by county in foreign-owned manufacturing units in Wales in each year since 1988.

Mr. David Hunt: The percentage share of employment by county in foreign-owned manufacturing units in Wales in each year since 1988 is in the following table:

	1988 *Per cent.*	*1989* *Per cent.*	*1990* *Per cent.*	*1991* *Per cent.*	*1992* *Per cent.*
Clwyd	18·0	19·3	18·8	18·3	18·8
Dyfed	3·9	6·6	7·4	7·0	6·7
Gwent	18·3	19·3	19·6	18·9	19·5
Gwynedd	2·7	2·2	1·9	2·1	1·8
Mid Glamorgan	27·8	26·5	26·4	27·2	27·1
Powys	0·3	0·4	0·6	0·4	0·3
South Glamorgan	11·7	10·1	11·0	12·3	12·7
West Glamorgan	17·3	15·5	14·3	13·9	13·1
Total Employment in Foreign-owned Manufacturing units in Wales	50,500	60,600	66,300	67,000	66,200

Source: Welsh Register of Manufacturing Employment.
Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

Site Protection

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take to protect sites of importance for nature and landscape conservation from being destroyed prior to applications being made for planning permission; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Government encourage local authorities to adopt appropriate policies in their development plans, and to make full use of their powers under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and under planning legislation to protect sites which they recognise as sites of local ecological importance. I am satisfied that measures available to local authorities are sufficient to secure the protection of such sites.

Child Care

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the applications made to date for funding under the out of school child care grant in Wales, indicating the amount allocated in each instance.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The out of school child care scheme will be administered by the training and enterprise councils. As yet, no payments of grant have been made.

A470

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on plans for the improvement of the A470 Llanrwst to Conwy road at Tanlan.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Preparation of a scheme is in progress and a public consultation exercise is planned for later this year.

Education

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the taster courses and other forms of pre-course support in Wales which are aimed specifically at encouraging the re-entry of women into education.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Six higher education institutions held eight taster courses for prospective teachers in the academic year 1991-92. The institutions concerned were UCW Aberystwyth, UCNW Bangor, UC Swansea, Cardiff institute of higher education, North Wales institute of higher education and Gwent college of higher education. UCNW Bangor will be holding a further taster course in September 1993. The taster courses provide men and women with the opportunity to learn more about teaching as a career. The courses are not aimed specifically at women but a substantial proportion of those attending have been women.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools and units for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children he and his Minister of State have visited since September 1992.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I has visited any designated school or unit for such children since September 1992.

Youth Justice

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many local authorities in Wales to date have established operational plans for tackling discrimination in youth justice; and what is the number that have drawn up an anti-discrimination statement relating to youth justice.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the additional special protection areas and *(b)* wetlands of international importance that have been designated in Wales during the last two years; and what plans he has for further designations.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since 1 April 1991, six sites in Wales have been designated as special protection areas (SPAs) under the EC Birds Directive and four sites designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention). The sites are as follows:

SPA/RAMSAR sites designated in Wales since 1 April 1991

	Date of designation
SPAs	
Skokholm	5 August 1991
Traeth Lafan (Conway Bay)	10 June 1992
Ynys Feurig, Cemlyn Bay and Skerries	10 June 1992
Glannau Aberdaron (Aberdaron Coast) and Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island)	10 June 1992
Glannau Ynys Gybi (Holy Island Coast)	10 June 1992
Burry Inlet[1]	14 July 1992
RAMSAR	
Llyn Tegid	7 November 1991
Llyn Idwal	7 November 1991
Burry Inlet[1]	14 July 1992
Cors Caron	28 September 1992

[1] Joint SPA/Ramsar site.

There are a number of other sites in Wales which are under consideration by the Countryside Council for Wales in a rolling programme of designations. The council's target is to submit six sites to the Welsh Office in 1993-94.

Discretionary Grants

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received on the subject of discretionary grants during the past 18 months; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: During the past 18 months, my right hon. Friend and I have received 35 representations on the subject of discretionary student awards. Such awards are the responsibility of local education authorities who can choose which students and courses to support and how much to spend.

Business Start-ups

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new businesses have been started in Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* by women in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information on the number of new business start-ups in Wales *(a)* in total and *(b)* by women in each of the last five years is not available.

However, VAT registration figures are available by year up to 1991 and for the period 1987-91 as a whole show a gross addition of 49,100 VAT registered businesses in Wales. The number of VAT registrations in Wales for each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*VAT registrations*
1987	8,700
1988	10,900
1989	10,900
1990	10,200
1991	8,400
1987-91	49,100

Integrated Administration and Control

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received concerning the subject of Welsh language IACS forms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Cardiff Wales Airport

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the new passenger air routes developed during 1992 and 1993 to date, to and from Cardiff, Wales airport; and what plans there are further to expand this number.

Sir Wyn Roberts: During 1992, services introduced at Cardiff, Wales airport included a scheduled link to Aberdeen and charter services to Dalaman and Antalya in Turkey, Gran Canaria, Lyon, Rome, Vienna and Berlin.

In 1993 charter services started to Paphos (Cyprus), Kos and Skiathos (Greece) and Adnan Menderes (Turkey).

The airport management has plans for additional new services but these are commercially confidential.

Market Testing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what date he wishes bids for market-testing jobs in his Department to be submitted.

Mr. David Hunt: Dates for submission of bids have not been fixed. They will be set out in the invitations to tender which are expected to issue during the summer.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice has been given to units within his Departments on the selection of advisers they should appoint to assist them in the market-testing process.

Mr. David Hunt: The in-house bid managers have been given training to help them to identify the issues which they need to consider in formulating their bids. Continuing discussions are also taking place between the bid managers and the Department's efficiency unit about the selection of relevant advisers.

Redundancies, Gwent

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all redundancy and closure announcements involving more than 10 people made by Gwent companies since April 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his Department's forecast of the number of people in Wales who were previously exempted from paying the community charge on the grounds of severe mental impairment and who *(a)* are liable for the water charge element of the council tax, *(b)* are liable for all or part of the property element of the council tax or *(c)* will be in receipt of 100 per cent. council tax benefit for the property element;

(2) what is his Department's assessment of the number of people in Wales who *(a)* will be in receipt of 100 per cent, council tax benefit for the property element of the tax and *(b)* will be exempt from payment of the personal element of the council tax on the grounds of severe mental impairment;

(3) if he will give details of the number of people in Wales exempted from payment of the community charge on the grounds of severe mental impairment in each year of its existence.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information required is not held centrally.

NHS Joint Staff Consultative Council

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the next ministerial meeting with the members of the Joint Staff Consultative Council for the Welsh health service will take place.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: These meetings do not take place on a regular basis and I have not made arrangements for a further meeting.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for each of the last five years the numbers of people receiving each social security benefit whose benefit was reviewed.

Mr. Burt: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 14 April to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, column *667*, what estimate he has made of the number of people receiving benefits in respect of myalgic encephalomyelitis.

Mr. Scott: The information is not available. No specific estimate of the number of people receiving benefits in respect of myalgic encephalomyelitis has been made. In general incapacity and disablement benefits are payable on the effects of an illness or disability, and not on the condition itself.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the additional benefits potentially available to single, double and multiple amputees, along with the relevant eligibility criteria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: A wide range of benefits is available to sick and disabled people, including amputees, provided they meet the conditions of entitlement. In general, disability benefits are payable on the basis of the effect an illness or disability has on a person's everyday life rather than the condition itself.

There is no specific benefit provided for amputees; however, people who are born without both feet or have had both feet amputated at or above the ankle qualify automatically for the higher rate of the mobility component of disability living allowance, if they satisfy other conditions of entitlement.

Benefits (Automatic Transfer)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received from people concerned about Government plans to make pension and benefit payments directly to bank accounts: and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received various representations, including a number of letters from right hon. and hon. Members. The Government's policy is to ensure that people have a choice of payment method and are aware of the choices available.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many benefit or pension recipients *(a)* collect benefit directly from a post office and *(b)* have benefit paid directly into (i) a bank or (ii) a building society;

(2) how many claim forms have been issued to new pension or benefit applicants which do not provide information regarding the Post Office as a location from which allowances can be collected.

Miss Widdecombe: The payment of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 24 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am, therefore, replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many benefit or pension recipients *(a)* collect benefit directly from a post office and *(b)* have benefit paid directly into (i) a bank or (ii) a building society; and how many claim forms have been issued to new pension or benefit applicants which do not provide information regarding the Post Office as a location from which allowances can be collected.

Although the number of beneficiaries for each benefit is known, because some individuals can receive more than one benefit, statistics on the total number of social security recipients are not available. However, at December 1992 around 4·3 m beneficiaries were paid directly into a bank or building society, while around 23·25 m were paid by a method of payment encashable at a post office. It is not possible to say, from our records, how many payments were made into bank accounts and how many into building society accounts.

In a recent trial, three versions of the Retirement Pension (RP) claim form were piloted. One version of the form did not refer directly to the Post Office as a location where RP may be collected, but it stated that other methods of payment were available and invited customers to request further information if required. Eight thousand copies of this form were issued. I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Visual Handicap

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has as to additional costs incurred by people with a visual handicap as a result of their disability.

Mr. Scott: Information about the additional costs incurred by visually handicapped people was included in the surveys of disability commissioned by the Government, carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, and published in 1988. Further information is available in the Royal National Institute for the Blind survey "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain", published in 1991.

Income Support

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures indicating *(a)* the number of claimants for income support in respect of mortgage interest in each standardised United Kingdom region, *(b)* the average weekly payment and *(c)* the total annual payment in each year since 1988.

Mr. Burt: The information available for Great Britain is in the following tables. Information for Northern Ireland should be requested from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1989 Recipients with half mortgage interest

Social security administrative region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
North Eastern	5,000	12·89	3,600,000
London North	5,000	32·45	9,300,000
South Western	2,000	22·22	2,800,000
Wales	3,000	22·24	3,100,000
Midlands	4,000	17·94	3,700,000
North Western	4,000	13·81	3,000,000
Scotland	2,000	20·20	2,000,000
London South	4,000	32·89	6,300,000
Great Britain	30,000	21·86	33,900,000

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1989 Recipients with full mortgage interest

Social security administrative region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
North Eastern	40,000	18·71	38,500,000
London North	39,000	33·92	68,300,000
South Western	21,000	28·55	30,600,000
Wales	20,000	18·82	19,300,000
Midlands	40,000	19·94	41,300,000
North Western	48,000	18·84	46,700,000
Scotland	13,000	25·13	17,300,000
London South	32,000	34·82	57,000,000
Great Britain	251,000	24·46	319,200,000

Source:
Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry May 1989

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1990 Recipients with half mortgage interest

Social security administrative region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
North Eastern	7,000	19·32	7,500,000
London North	7,000	48·17	16,500,000
South Western	3,000	28·64	4,200,000
Wales	2,000	26·90	2,700,000
Midlands	6,000	24·72	8,200,000
North Western	8,000	26·58	10,500,000
Scotland	2,000	41·72	4,300,000
London South	6,000	57·39	17,000,000
Great Britain	40,000	33·69	70,800,000

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1990

Recipients with full mortgage interest

Social security administrative region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
North Eastern	38,000	24·03	46,900,000
London North	45,060	47·94	111,900,000
South Western	23,000	40·34	47,400,000
Wales	24,000	23·31	28,600,000
Midlands	45,000	25·58	60,400,000
North Western	42,000	25·11	54,900,000
Scotland	12,000	31·19	20,300,000
London South	41,000	52·36	112,200,000
Great Britain	270,000	34·42	482,600,000

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1991

Recipients with half mortgage interest

Social security administrative region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
North Eastern	9,000	20·53	9,600,000
London North	17,000	43·44	38,600,000
South Western	7,000	39·07	15,000,000
Wales	4,000	26·62	4,800,000
Midlands	12,000	31·95	20,300,000
North Western	7,000	22·64	8,600,000
Scotland	4,000	24·69	4,600,000
London South	14,000	49·22	35,100,000
Great Britain	74,000	35·61	136,700,000

Source: Income support statistics annual inquiry May 1990.

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1991

Social Security Administrative Region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
Recipients with full mortgage interest			
North Eastern	43,000	31·86	71,600,000
London North	63,000	63·80	208,000,000
South Western	33,000	54·08	91,700,000
Wales	24,000	36·02	44,000,000
Midlands	57,000	36·02	106,400,000
North Western	51,000	29·20	77,600,000
Scotland	14,000	37·99	28,400,000
London South	53,000	67·21	184,900,000
Great Britain	337,000	46·34	812,600,000

Source: Income support statistics annual enquiry May 1991.

Income support recipients with mortgage interest considered in their assessment May 1992

Social Security Administrative Region	*Number of cases*	*Average amount of mortgage interest*	*Annual amount of mortgage interest*
Recipients with half mortgage interest			
North Eastern	7,000	21·35	8,100,000
London North	15,000	39·93	30,500,000
South Western	6,000	31·25	9,600,000
Wales	3,000	21·47	3,100,000
Midlands	10,000	22·43	11,900,000
North Western	8,000	24·10	10,100,000
Scotland	3,000	21·49	3,100,000
London South	13,000	39·63	25,800,000
Great Britain	64,000	30·59	102,300,000

Housing Benefit

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to amend housing benefit regulations to secure that any disincentive for local authorities wishing to embark on private sector leasing arrangements as opposed to bed-and-breakfast accommodation is removed provided that value-for-money criteria are met.

Mr. Burt: The housing benefit subsidy arrangements are designed to provide a similar level of support for authorities whether they choose bed and breakfast accommodation or short-term leased accommodation to house homeless persons.

Benefits

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he is making to the availability of benefits for disabled people; when they will come into effect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: New regulations come into effect today. They will mean that the presence of a person who is registered blind is ignored for the purpose of the living alone rule when deciding whether a disabled person qualifies for the severe disability premium. This change recognises that someone who is blind should not be expected to care for a severely disabled person. It applies to income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit and will give worthwhile extra help to those who qualify.

Top-up Claims (Forecasts)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent forecasts of claimants for top-up claims were inaccurate; and what action he intends to take to ensure that future forecasting for changes in benefit schemes is improved.

Mr. Scott: Forecasts of claims to any new benefit scheme are subject to significant margins of error as they are dependent upon estimates of both the eligible population and their likely claiming behaviour. Estimating eligibility for disability benefits is particularly difficult as the eligible population can only be identified through surveys.

Top-up claims to disability living allowance could be made by all those aged under 65 who were receiving either attendance allowance or mobility allowance. The forecast was that 137,000 of the eligible population would apply, the actual number to do so was 234,000. This underestimate of 97,000 was offset by an over-estimate of 61,000 for new claims so that overall, claims were within 4 per cent. of forecasts.

For the future, the establishment of the family resources survey and the improvement in social security statistical systems should help reduce the margin of error attached to future forecasts.

"Paying for Independence"

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration his Department has given to the Policy Studies Institute's findings from a survey of disabled people entitled "Paying For Independence", a copy of which has been sent to him; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I have read with interest the first findings of the research undertaken by the Policy Studies Institute, and I look forward to reading it when it is published in the autumn.

Allowances (Processing Delays)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to compensate claimants who may have suffered financial loss, resulting in delays in processing claims for *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* attendance allowance and *(c)* mobility allowance, where the delays were less than eight months or where financial loss exceeded £10 a month.

Miss Widdecombe: Under the Department's special payment arrangements, consideration will be given to making an ex-gratia payment to someone who has incurred extra expense or suffered actual finanical loss as a result of official error.

Over and above these payments, compensation for loss of use of benefit can also be considered when payment of benefit is excessively delayed. A significant improvement to the arrangements, announced on 4 May means that, for a new claim, compensation can be considered if payment of the benefit is delayed by more than a period of six months plus the target clearance time for clearing the bulk of the claims—usually between 85 per cent. and 95 per cent.

Special compensation arrangements for late payment of benefit were also announced for those people who claimed disability living allowance, attendance allowance or mobility allowance on or after 3 February 1992 who were paid before 1 April 1993 and who suffered a delay of more than eight months in the payment of their benefit. For these people, a payment of £10 per month for each month which exceeded the eight-month period is payable to compensate for the late payment of benefit. No actual financial loss has to have been incurred before payment can be made.

Benefits (Abatement)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women have had their unemployment benefit abated due to receipt of a personal or occupational pension scheme in each year since 1981.

Mr. Burt: The available information is in the table.

Date	*Numbers whose UB was extinguished due to receipt of an occupational or personal pension*			*Numbers whose UB was reduced due to receipt of an occupational or personal pension*		
	Men	*Women*	*Total*	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
November 1982			3,900			16,300
November 1983			1,200			9,500
November 1984			1,000			9,700
November 1985			1,200			9,100
November 1986			1,100			10,700
November 1987			600			8,200
November 1988			700			6,700
November 1989	4,700	300	5,000	7,700	500	8,200
November 1990	4,100	200	4,300	7,600	500	8,100
November 1991	7,900	400	8,400	14,400	1,100	15,500
November 1992	10,900	900	11,800	16,600	1,600	18,200

Notes:

[1] Source: Half-yearly analysis of unemployed claimants.

[2] No information was available for 1981 due to industrial action.

[3] The age threshold for abatement of UB by an occupational pension was reduced from age 60 to age 55 from 1 January 1989.

[4] The abatement rule was extended to include personal pensions from 9 October 1989.

[5] A separate breakdown for men and women is not available for the years up to 1988. However, the number of women in the total figure for these years is believed to be negligible as it would only have applied to the small number of women who claimed UB after the age of 60 years and who received occupational pensions of an amount in excess of the threshold.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level at current prices of the £35 abatement provision on occupational pensioners in the year it was introduced.

Mr. Burt: The current value of the threshold for the abatement provision on occupational and personal pensions would be £66·44 per week.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disability living allowance appeals have been heard by disability appeal tribunals; and in how many cases the appeal succeeded wholly or in part.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 24 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many Disability Living Allowance (DLA) appeals have been heard by Disability Appeal Tribunals (DATS) and in how many cases the appeal succeeded wholly or in part.

For the period February 1992 to 30 April 1993 there have been a total of 319 appeals heard by the DATs. Of these some 133 succeeded in their appeal either wholly or in part.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he intends to take to reduce waiting times for attendance allowance, mobility allowance and disability living allowance from application to appeal hearing.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 24 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking what action he intends to take to reduce waiting time for Attendance Allowance (AA), Mobility Allowance (Mob A) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from application for appeal to appeal hearing.

There are a number of current initiatives that have been instigated with a view to speeding up the throughput of appeal hearings. These include:—

The establishment of a centralised Appeals Unit to process all applications for appeal relating to DLA, MoB A, AA (under 65) and transitional AA.

The availability of additional resources to improve the speed with which an appeal submission is prepared.

The setting of aggressive internal targets to ensure that external performance indicators are achieved.

The improvement of courier arrangements to ensure next day delivery to the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS)—Disability Appeal Tribunal Central Office (DATCO) of all submissions despatched from the Fylde.

The arrangement of monthly liaison meetings with ITS to identify any problem areas and introduce operational improvements.

The planning of a pilot scheme with the aim of streamlining the current style of submission.

It should be noted that once appeals have been prepared and submitted by BA the actual scheduling and subsequent hearing of them falls wholly within the remit of ITS. This is an area over which BA does not have absolute control.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what lessons have been learned from the introduction of disability living allowance which could be applied to the introduction of new benefits in the future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Changes to the social security scheme are always formally evaluated against both their policy and operational objectives. Some valuable points have already emerged which will help to inform future developments.

Pensions

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, when he intends to establish an executive agency for war pensioners.

Mr. Lilley *[pursuant to his reply, 9 February 1993, col. 602]:* I am pleased to be able to announce that Mr. Peter Mathison has been appointed as the new chief executive for the War Pensions agency. He will take up appointment as chief executive designate on 1 June 1993 pending the launch of the Agency in April 1994. The appointment is for an initial three-year term.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 26 May 1993

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police services in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is published annually in the "Police and Constabulary Almanac, Official Register". A copy of the 1993 edition has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take the necessary steps to arrange for the prefix royal to added to each of the police services in England.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No.

Prison Escort Services

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all civil servants and their past responsibilities where they have subsequently joined any of the companies involved in tenders for British gaols or court escort services.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not possible to list former civil servants who may subsequently have taken up employment with private sector companies in this field, since staff below grade 3 who wish to take up outside employment are only required to seek approval to do so for a period of two years after leaving Crown employment, and in certain specified circumstances. Six former members of the Home Office have sought and obtained approval under these procedures to take up employment with companies involved in the provision of prison-related services. All were governor grades, three were governing establishments; one was head of custody in an establishment; one was in the inspectorate of prisons; and one in the remands contracts unit. In addition, a former police superintendent on secondment to the unit was given approval to take up employment with such a company.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if civil servants attempting to recruit staff for companies involved in tendering for Home Office business will in future face disciplinary action.

Mr. Charles Wardle: If, in relation to the tendering process for Home Office business, there is evidence of any impropriety on the part of Home Office staff, disciplinary action will be taken where this is considered appropriate.

Drugs

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library a full copy of the research report from Sheffield university, prepared for his Department, on the prevalence of drug use among young people.

Mr. Jack: A full report will be published later this year and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of places for *(a)* men and *(b)* women at probation or bail hostels covering the Greater London area on 10 May.

Mr. Jack: As at 10 May 1993, there was a total of 360 places at approved bail and probation hostels in the Greater London area: 308 are designated for men; 33 for women; and the remaining 19 are available to either men or women, as required.

Emergency Warnings

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 19 May if he will outline the alternative arrangements to the United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation, based on radio and television broadcasts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Arrangements for the use of radio and television to broadcast warnings to the public have existed alongside the siren system for a number of years and they involve the broadcasting of pre-recorded messages over existing broadcasting networks.

Police Inspectors

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female police inspectors in England and Wales were members of ethnic minorities at the most recent available date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: At the end of January 1993, 28 police inspectors in England and Wales were members of ethnic minorities. All were male.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners died in custody in the 12 months to March; and how many have died since 5 April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the prison service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 24 May 1993:

Deaths in custody

The Home Secretary has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on deaths in custody. Between 1 April 1992 and 31 March 1993, eighty-six prisoners died in prison custody. Since 5 April 1993 nine prisoners have died in prison custody. These figures include deaths from all causes in both directly managed and contracted out operations.

Naturalisation

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current time lag in the processing of naturalisation applications.

Mr. Charles Wardle: For certificates of naturalisation granted in April 1993 the average waiting time was 21 months. For those applying now waiting times should average less than 12 months.

Police (Management Supervision)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the establishment in each police authority in England was employed on management supervision duties at the latest available date.

Mr. Charles Wardle: This information is not held centrally.

European Parliamentary Constituencies

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Fry) on 1 April, *Official Report*, column *385*, if he will make a statement on progress in formulating proposals for the boundaries of European parliamentary constituencies.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We hope to make an announcement on this matter shortly.

Unit Fines

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the full evidence which led him to decide to scrap the unit fines system, including details of those cases in which too high a fine was given and those in which too low a fine was given.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* In reply to a question from the hon. Member on 19 May, columns *211-12*, I have explained the reasons why my right hon. and learned Friend decided that it would be right to end the unit fine system. Although he was influenced, in taking that decision, by representations, both orally and in writing, from magistrates, members of the public and Members of Parliament, it would not be practicable to collate these representations as "evidence" and place them in the Library as requested. Nor would it be appropriate for the Secretary of State to comment on sentencing in individual cases.

Police Authorities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those police authorities that have been considered for amalgamation *(a)* during his period of office as Home Secretary and *(b)* during the past 10 years; and which proposals did not proceed because of the current procedure for amalgamation (i) as the only or primary reason and (ii) as a contributory reason.

Mr. Charles Wardle *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* No police authorities have been considered for amalgamation during the term of office of my right hon. and learned Friend. At the time of the abolition of the metropolitan county council's consideration was given to possible changes in the relevant police force areas. No changes were made because it was felt unlikely that reorganisation would improve effectiveness. The amalgamation procedure was not a factor in this decision.

Complete records for the last 10 years are not available. However, the records that are available indicate that detailed consideration has not been given to the amalgamation of any other force areas during that time.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1992.

Mr. Waldegrave: The House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology has published one report since April 1992. The Government's response is contained in the White Paper "Realising our Potential: A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The position in respect of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, whose remit relates to the work of both Her Majesty's Treasury and the OPSS, is covered in the reply by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 24 May 1993, column *419*.

TRANSPORT

Road Safety

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has conducted into safety factors in respect of new roads.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Department carries out safety audits of new trunk roads before they are opened to traffic and specifically reviews their safety performance one and three years after opening as well as continuing with routine monitoring of safety. It also carries out a programme of research into factors which affect road safety, including, for example, pedestrian and cycle facilities, traffic calming measures, junction design, surfacing and safety fences. This is used in reviewing standards for new roads and in improving existing roads.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been undertaken on the additional injuries in accidents to pedestrians and cyclists caused by bull and roo bars on motor vehicles.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Pedestrian injury accidents are currently being investigated by the Transport Research Laboratory. As yet this research has been unable to reach firm conclusion concerning injuries from bull or roo bars; but I expect the investigations to show increased accident injury from such equipment.

Berkley Avenue, Greenford

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish his inspector's decision on the inquiry into the proposal to close Berkley avenue, Greenford, between Greenford road and Oldfield lane north; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The Secretary of State for Transport expects shortly to announce his decision in the light of the inspector's report on the inquiry into the proposal to close a length of Berkley avenue. Arrangements will be made for the hon. Member to receive a copy of the decision letter.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of papers presented to the meeting of the high level forum on the channel tunnel rail link held on 19 May.

Mr. Freeman: Copies of the four papers presented have been sent to right hon. and hon. Members affected by the route of the rail link and placed in the Library. The papers are "Department of Transport—Property purchase and compensation policy", "DoT—Terms of reference for the further study of the London terminus", "DoT—Arrangements for the study and assessment of options for stations on the Union Railway" and a paper by Union Railways entitled "Route and stations development programme", all titles are prefaced by "Paper for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link High Level Forum".

Traffic, South-East London

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the official journey taken through south London on 18 May by the Minister for Roads and Traffic whilst in a 1907 taxi cab; and what proposals he now has to improve the road network and traffic flow in south-east London.

Mr. Norris: The hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that the Minister for Transport in London was being driven in the splended taxi which the hon. and learned Gentleman so obviously admired, to Chester house in Kennington officially to open the excellent Royal British Legion taxi drivers training school.

The Department has three schemes in its programme for improving trunk roads in south-east London. It also pays transport supplementary grant at 50 per cent. of accepted expenditure and capital support to local authorities to improve their local roads. A further current initiative is improving the efficiency of the existing road network by the development of red routes.

Crossrail

Mr. Peter Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions were reached by Schroeders and Warburgs in its advice to his Department on the prospects of a private sector contribution towards crossrail; what form this contribution is expected to take; and if he will make available details of the financing of the project before 8 June.

Mr. Norris: Our consultants, Warburgs and Bechtel, both concluded that crossrail is a project that the private sector will find attractive. The basis on which the private sector would contribute to the cost of the project will not be settled by 8 June.

British Rail Pension Fund

Ms C[illegible]ston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the value of the surplus in the British Rail pension fund for the last five years for which records are available.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the trustees of the pension fund.

Twyford Down

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to recent new proposals for a route for the M3 bypass around Winchester which aims at minimising damage to Twyford Down.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Alternative proposals for the M3 route currently being constructed through Twyford Down were submitted to my Department earlier this year by a media film company. The proposals were considered carefully, but they related to options which had already been considered and rejected.

A19, Durham

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the severity of disintegration of the newly laid surface to the A19 in County Durham.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Major maintenance work to the southbound carriageway of the A19 between Peterlee and Sheraton was completed in January 1993.

Minor chipping loss which has occurred over approximately 5 per cent. of the total area of surfacing will require remedial works under the maintenance period of the contract by the contractor at his own cost.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many patches of disintegration have been identified on the newly laid surface of the A19 in County Durham; which contractor has been asked to carry out repairs; and how long this is going to take.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Major maintenance work to the southbound carriageway of the A19 between Peterlee and Sheraton was completed in January 1993.

Inspections have identified 28 areas of minor chipping loss. Amey Construction Ltd., the main contractor, will carry out the remedial works at its own cost during the 12-month maintenance period. The works are programmed to take 10 days and will be carried out under contra-flow.

Road Improvements (Public Inquiries)

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the usual length of time between the announcement of a public inquiry into a major road improvement scheme and its first hearing.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The length of time between formal announcement and the opening of an inquiry varies

according to the circumstances of the individual scheme. It is never less than six weeks in order to allow sufficient time for all parties to prepare their case.

West Wellow Bypass

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a map showing the proposed route of the A36 West Wellow bypass as announced in his Department's press release dated 19 May.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A public consultation brochure showing the route options now being considered for the A36 West Wellow bypass is being published on Friday 28 May. A copy will be placed in the Library on that date.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current estimated cost of building the east London river crossing; and how he has calculated any changes since his answer of 16 July 1992, *Official Report*, column *862*.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The total estimated cost of the east London river crossing remains at £300 million at 1989 prices.

London Travelcard

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to protect the London travelcard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The Government are promoting discussions with public transport operators in London on how best to develop the present travelcard to meet the future needs of passengers and operators. We intend, when we seek powers for bus deregulation in London, to give operators the right to participate on fair terms in multi-operator ticketing schemes.

NATIONAL FINANCE

EC Institutions (Official Visits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the tax treatment of official visits by hon. Members to European Community institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have tabled a new clause to the Finance Bill which will exempt from tax payments of expenses for Members' visits to Community institutions in Brussels, Luxembourg and Strasbourg, under the terms of the Resolution of the House of 6 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *582*.

Relocation Expenses

Mr. Moss: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations his Department has had on the proposed reform of tax relief on relocation expenses.

Mr. Dorrell: A series of consultative meetings has been arranged by the Inland Revenue since the proposed reform of the tax treatment of relocation expenses was announced on Budget day. The meetings have been attended by representatives of employers, professional bodies and representative organisations.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has as to how many taxpayers are affected by the freezing of the tax thresholds and allowances proposed in the March 1993 Budget, giving the numbers who have gross incomes of *(a)* less than £30,000, *(b)* £25,000, *(c)* £20,000, *(d)* earnings below the higher rate threshold and *(e)* earnings below the national insurance upper earnings limit.

Mr. Dorrell: Latest estimates for 1993-94 are as follows:

Number of individuals affected

Millions	
(a) Total income under £30,000	22·9
(b) Total income under £25,000	21·8
(c) Total income under £20,000	19·6
(d) Total earned income[1] under £27,145[2]	22·7
(e) Total earned income[1] under £21,840[3]	22·1

[1] Includes income from employment, self-employment and occupational pensions.
[2] The sum of the basic rate limit and the level of the basic personal allowance for those under 65.
[3] National Insurance upper earnings limit.

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to how many foreign individuals currently living in the United Kingdom the Inland Revenue has granted non domicile status for tax purposes; and how much this concession cost the Exchequer in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that this information is not available.

Overseas Dividends

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers receive income from overseas dividends; and what was the gross sum received before tax.

Mr. Dorrell: I regret that the information requested is not available.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total number of taxpayers after the Budget changes in 1993-94, giving figures separately for *(a)* those who pay national insurance contributions only on incomes below the income tax threshold, *(b)* basic rate taxpayers with earned income below the NIC upper earnings limit, *(c)* basic rate taxpayers with earned income above the NIC upper earnings limit, *(d)* all basic rate taxpayers, *(e)* higher rate taxpayers with earned income above the NIC earnings limit, *(f)* all higher rate taxpayers and *(g)* all taxpayers.

Mr. Dorrell: The latest available estimates are as follows:

Taxpaying individuals, 1993-94

millions

Marginal rate	*Aged under 65*	*Aged 65 and over*	*Total*
Lower rate	3·5	1·4	4·9
Basic rate	16·5	1·5	18·0
Higher rate	1·5	0·1	1·6
Total	21·5	3·0	24·5

Taxpaying individuals, aged under 65, 1993-94

millions

Marginal rate	*No income subject to NIC*	*Earnings[1] between LEL and UEL*	*Earnings above UEL*	*Total*
Lower rate	0·7	2·7	—	3·5
Basic rate	0·7	14·0	1·7	16·5
Higher rate	—	0·1	1·4	1·5
Total	1·5	16·8	3·2	21·5

[1] Includes earnings from employment or self-employment.

Overseas Entertainers

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the amount of withholding tax deducted from overseas entertainers in the film industry and in total in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The total withholding tax deducted in each of the last five years from foreign entertainers and sportsmen has been:

	£
1988-89	12,537,141
1989-90	13,387,341
1990-91	18,612,822
1991-92	16,690,738
1992-93	20,294,617

No breakdown of these figures is available.

Drugs Seizures

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many seizures of *(a)* heroin, *(b)* cocaine and *(c)* synthetic drugs have occurred in (i) the United Kingdom and its waters and (ii) Wales in each year from 1987.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is contained in tables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Statistics of drugs seizures and offenders dealt with, United Kingdom 1991", and table A1.3 of "Statistics of drugs seizures and offendes dealt with, United Kingdom, 1987-91" (area tables), copes of which are in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vance-Owen Plan

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Secretary of State since 17 May on the continued credibility of the Vance-Owen plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) on 24 May, c. *375.* by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Grantham, (Mr. Hogg).

Detention Camp, Gospic

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the existence of a detention camp at Gospic in Croatia; what action he has taken about the matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received no representations. We remain in close touch with the International Committee of the Red Cross about its work in identifying, securing access to and progressively closing detention camps in former Yugoslavia. If any new evidence is brought forward of detention centres, we would immediately pass it on to the relevant organisations.

Human Rights

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the establishment of a United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We recognise the need to strengthen the role of the United Nations centre for human rights. With our EC partners we have proposed that the post of

director of the centre be upgraded to that of Under Secretary-General for Human Rights/High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the names of the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations world conference on human rights in Vienna.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 13 May, c. *559*. The precise composition of the delegation is being finalised, and will be transmitted to the conference organisers in due course.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's aims for the United Nations world conference on human rights in Vienna.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 27 April, column *371*.

HEALTH

Royal Free Trust

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients have been treated by the Royal Free Trust since it became an NHS trust hospital; and what were the numbers treated in the two previous years.

Mr. Sackville: The figures for the first two years of the Royal Free Trust relate to finished consultant episodes in the general and acute specialties, and are as follows:

	Number
1991-92	33,822
1992-93	42,539

The total for 1992-93 includes patients undergoing renal dialysis.

No information is available centrally on the number of patients treated in the years before the Royal Free achieved trust status. However, a special exercise conducted for the House Select Committee established that there were 32,040 FCEs in 1990-91.

Nebulisers

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy regarding the free provision of nebulisers for use by patients in need.

Dr. Mawhinney: Health authorities must provide free of charge any equipment which, taking account of resources, needs and clinical priorities locally, they decide to provide as part of a national health service treatment programme. This applies whether the equipment is supplied permanently or on loan, and includes subsequent maintenance costs as well as initial supply. Hand-operated nebulisers may be prescribed by general practitioners and are free of charge to patients exempt from prescription charges.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to date of the preparation, production and distribution of consultation documents by all NHS trust applicants.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of £5·93 million has been made available to regional health authorities for the cost of consultation on the four waves of national health service trusts during the years 1990-91 to 1993-94.

Family Planning Services

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure a free choice of family planning services on the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: National health service family planning is a self-referral service and people who wish to use it are free to choose their source of advice—their own general practitioner, another general practitioner if he or she is willing, or a family planning clinic. The Government's aim, as stated in the White Paper "The Health of the Nation" is that by 1994-95 the full range of NHS family planning services, however provided, should be appropriate, accessible and comprehensive.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research has been undertaken by her Department upon the effect of the inclusion of contraceptives on the selected list scheme upon levels of unplanned pregnancies in the United Kingdom;

(2) what assessment she has made of the effects of the extension of the selected list scheme in respect of contraceptives on her Department's target in respect of teenage pregnancies.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) on 18 January at col. *97*.

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations she has received in opposition to the extension of the selected list scheme to contraceptives.

Dr. Mawhinney: Approximately 420.

Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the legal status of the sub-committees of the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs;

(2) what procedures were followed in making the appointments to the sub-committees of the Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs; and what were the criteria used to judge the suitability for membership of these committees.

Dr. Mawhinney: The sub-committees do not have a legal status which is separate from the main committee. The Advisory Committee on National Health Service Drugs decided which of its members would serve on sub-committees taking into account their professional expertise.

Salmonella

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list, for each year from 1987 to date, the number of cases of salmonella poisoning which have not been caused by eating infected food.

Mr. Sackville: The annual statistics published about confirmed salmonella infections are based on reports, by the public health laboratory service and hospital laboratories in England and Wales to the PHLS. The majority of these reports relate to individual cases and information as to the cause of infection is rarely available. In outbreaks involving two or more people, a cause other than food is reported infrequently. Occasionally outbreaks resulting from spread from person to person are reported, usually in an institutional setting.

Halcion

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement about the use of the drug Halcion in treating cases of severe depression.

Dr. Mawhinney: Halcion, or triazolam, is a treatment for insomnia and not for depression. It was withdrawn from the United Kingdom market in 1991 on grounds of safety because of psychiatric adverse reactions, including depression. Under the Medicines Act the manufacturer has rights of appeal against the permanent withdrawal of the drug and at the present time the matter remains under appeal.

Hospitals (Location)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what attention is paid in deciding on locations of hospitals to the relative age and level of car ownership of the surrounding population.

Mr. Sackville: The catchment area of a hospital will be determined by the contracts taken out by district health authorities or fund-holding general practitioner practices, on behalf of their residents and patients. Decisions on new hospital sites will be influenced by a variety of local factors, including accessibility.

NHS Employees (Freedom of Speech)

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *487*, when the final guidelines on freedom of speech for national health service employees will be published; and if publication will be delayed to take into account the findings of the Clothier inquiry.

Dr. Mawhinney: We do not consider it appropriate to delay the issue of the guidelines and expect them to be issued in the near future.

Hospitals (Security)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures she has taken or intends to take to improve security in NHS hospitals following the recent report of Crime Prevention Consulting Ltd.

Mr. Sackville: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has given a detailed reply in another place.

A full report and its recommendations were presented at a conference, sponsored jointly by the Department of Health, the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, and the National Health Service Trust Federation, on 11 May.

My noble Friend wrote to the chairmen of all health authorities and trusts on 13 May bringing the report to their attention. A copy of the letter is available in the Library.

The NHS management executive has also written—EL(93)47, a copy of which is available in the Library—to all general managers and trust chief executives, outlining the key messages in the report and asked them to review their procedures for crime and loss prevention in the light of the review and to submit by 30 September 1993 a report on improvements made or planned.

A new NHS security advisory group is being set up to promote a programme of security improvements and carry forward the recommendations of the consultants' report.

Fertility Treatment

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting period for IVF treatment; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Waiting time information by specialty is published in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", a copy of which is available in the Library. Information on the time that waiting list patients have waited for treatment of specific conditions is not collected centrally.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to amend the waiting list system for IVF and fertility treatment for childless couples to take into account the age of that couple; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Decisions about the appropriate treatment for a couple seeking help over infertility are a matter of clinical judgment. Age is one of the factors clinicians will consider in assessing a patients' suitability for any form of infertility treatment.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the hospital waiting times for patients in the Northern regional health authority for 12 months and 18 months; what were the comparable figures for each of the last two years; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Waiting times information by regional health authority is given in "Hospital Waiting List Statistics: England", published twice a year, copies of which are available in the Library. Latest provisional figures for 31 March 1993 were published on 10 May 1993—press release H93/740. These show the number of patients waiting for more than a year in the Northern regional health authority has fallen by 72 per cent. or nearly 4,500 patients in the two years since March 1991.

Condensation

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has available about the effect of condensation in the home upon people's health.

Mr. Sackville: The Department is aware of research carried out by the Building Research Establishment, an executive agency of the Department of the Environment.

Drugs

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will place in the Library a full copy of the research report from Durham university, prepared for her Department, on the prevalence of drug use among young people.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 May.

Laboratory Technicians

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 19 May, *Official Report*, columns *197-98*, if the word technician in her answer means laboratory technicians.

Dr. Mawhinney: Yes.

Concorde Trials

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will place in the Library a copy of the informed consent information and forms which were given to subjects who were asked to take part in the Concorde trials.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

I have today arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Nuclear Fuels plc

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what types of information he is obliged to make public regarding British Nuclear Fuels plc; and which areas of its operation are treated as confidential.

Mr. Eggar: For the considerations affecting the Government's policy in this area, I refer the hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, *Official Report*, 7 July 1992, column *140* and 24 March 1993, column *612*.

Waste to Energy

Mr. Evennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to be able to announce a decision on the proposal for a refuse-to-energy plant in Belvedere.

Mr. Eggar: The timing of his report is a matter for the inquiry inspector. When my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade receives the report he will give timely but careful consideration to it.

My right hon. Friend will announce his decision on the application at the earliest possible opportunity after receiving the report.

British Airways

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will ask the Director-General of Fair Trading to investigate evidence of anti-competitive activities by British Airways against Air Europe, and its parent company ILG, since 1987;

(2) what inquiries he has commissioned into the allegations of anti-competitive practices by British Airways against rival airlines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Allegations of anti-competitive practices in European air services fall to be considered by the EC Commission under articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome. The Civil Aviation Authority has powers to investigate complaints of anti-competitive practices on specific routes to and from destinations outside the EC and to consider appropriate remedies.

Under paragraph 4(1) of the schedule to the Anti-competitive Practices (Exclusions) Order 1980 (SI 1980 No. 979), any course of conduct pursued by an air transport undertaking solely in respect of carriage by air, otherwise than on a charter flight, is excluded from investigation under the Competition Act.

Mr. Mandelson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he was aware of the evidence of access by British Airways to computer information concerning rival airlines, when he gave his approval to British Airways' takeover of Dan Air in November 1992.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: The President of the Board of Trade's decisions in merger cases whether to refer proposed acquisitions to the MMC take account of comprehensive advice from the Director General of Fair Trading on the public interest issues raised by the merger concerned.

Additionality

Mr. McMaster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what information he has available on how the additionality principle is applied within each member state of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the European Commission's third annual report on the implementation of the reform of the structural funds, pages 17 to 18, and the European Court of Auditors' annual report concerning the financial year 1991—*Official Journal of the European Communities*, C330 of 15 December 1992, pages 130-131, 146, 153, 346, 355, 359—copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

British Aerospace and Rover Group

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom of the European Commission decision of 9 March requiring the Government to secure repayment of £44·4 million of state aid plus interest from British Aerospace and the Rover Group.

Mr. Heseltine: British Aerospace plc yesterday paid to the Government the sum of £57·6 million made up as follows:

	£ million
Repayment of state aid received by BAe and Rover in 1988 in connection with privatisation costs and buying out minority shareholders	11·0
Repayment of state aid representing the interest that would have been paid between 1988 and 1990 by BAe had it not been allowed to defer (interest free) the payment of the purchase price of Rover	33·4
Interest on the above sums through to yesterday	13·2
TOTAL	57·6

The Commission decision is intended to put BAe in the same position, after tax, as if it had not received state aid. Tax relief would have been available for interest of £33·4 million if it had been paid between 1988 and 1990. Tax relief would also normally be available for the interest of £13·2 million on a United Kingdom debt. BAe therefore now intends to investigate whether tax relief is available for both amounts. If relief is available on both sums at 33 per cent.—the current corporation tax rate—it will reduce the net cost to BAe by £11·0 million and £4·4 million respectively. The net cost to BAe of yesterday's payment would then be £42·2 million.

BAe has expressed concern that under United Kingdom law one or both of the amounts of £33·4 million and £13·2 million might not attract tax relief. If that were to be the case, BAe would have paid, and the Government would have received, up to £15·4 million more than the Commission envisaged. The Government understand BAe's concern and have also noted the opinion of the Advocate General that the Commission might reasonably assume that tax relief would be given on the payment of £33·4 million.

To ensure that the payment has the effect that the Commission intended, and that BAe is not disadvantaged by any difference between United Kingdom tax law and the tax assumptions made by the Commission, the Government have made arrangements to ensure that, if tax relief is not available in respect of the two payments, the company is returned to the same position as it would have been if it had not received the state aid. This would be done by transferring to the Inland Revenue, out of the sum received, an amount equal to the tax relief in question. That would then be set against BAe's tax liability. Details of the arrangements are in a note which is being deposited in the Library of the House. Both the European Commission and the Inland Revenue have been consulted about, and have raised no objections to, the proposed arrangements.

Science and Technology

Mr. Batiste: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how the science and technology policy of his Department will be affected by the White Paper on science, engineering and technology published today; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The Government want to see a new partnership with industry, bringing together public sector resources, to increase the nation's competitiveness. Today's White Paper on Science, Engineering and Technology commits the Government to partnership in science and technology to ensure they contribute more fully to the nation's wealth and well-being. The DTI is committed to making this partnership work. DTI's budget for industrial innovation is rising by some 15 per cent. this year to around £125 million, despite pressure on public spending. While the main responsibility for innovation must remain with industry, DTI has an important role.

Support for R and D projects from DTI's innovation budget is less than 2 per cent. of industry's own R and D spend. Thirteen United Kingdom companies individually spend more on R and D each year than DTI does through its innovation budget. Moreover, much of DTI's support goes to the large firms who account for so much of industry's total. In view of this, DTI will change the balance of its financial support so as to concentrate in future on helping smaller firms gain access to technology; building up partnerships between firms, with academia, and overseas; and ensuring firms have the services they need to innovate and to do business better. Smaller firms need effective local delivery of technology that may require sourcing on a local, United Kingdom or global basis. Both the access to that technology and the infrastructure which can provide it will therefore need to be strengthened, taking account of the Faraday principles, as will the promotion of innovation and the spread of best practice.

The Department will significantly improve companies' access to science and technology by making innovation services available locally, for example through one-stop shops. These services will place the national and international expertise on industry's doorstep. One-stop shops will help form sustained partnerships, bringing together public and private sector business services, including DTI technology and innovation services, for the benefit of the local company customer. The DTI will build on the local innovation networks which are already used by firms. These networks draw on expertise in higher education institutions, technical colleges, industrial research organisations and others.

DTI will put more effort into helping firms of all sizes come together to undertake R and D projects, including projects under the LINK and EUREKA initiatives. The Department will also work with other Departments, the research councils and in Europe to help this process to succeed. DTI will therefore:

- design its innovation services for delivery involving one-stop shops;
- support the establishment of local partnerships through which firms can obtain the technology and business services they need for innovation;
- consult industry over a more comprehensive information service about technology overseas;
- work to harness publicly-funded effort in science and technology;
- through its sector divisions and otherwise, act as a voice for business in science and technology throughout Government.

In view of the decision to increase support for technology transfer and best practice activities, DTI will be reducing its support for industry/industry collaboration through its innovation budget, and from 1 September will support only projects which will result in exceptional economic benefit.

Recognising the particularly important contribution that smaller companies make to the innovative process, direct single-company support to small SMEs will continue under the successful small firms merit award for research and technology—SMART—competition and SPUR—support for products under research—scheme. However, from 1 April 1994 it is proposed to limit SPUR to companies with up to 250 employees in order to concentrate on the smaller firms which have the greatest difficulty in raising R and D capital.

Kvaerner Govan

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much intervention funding Kvaerner Govan has received over the last five years.

Mr. Sainsbury: Offers of grant and details of the amounts paid are matters of commercial confidence between the Department and the company concerned.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many ships Kvaerner Govan has received shipbuilding intervention funding in the last five years; and what is the total value of the assistance given.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* Offers of grant and details of the amounts paid are matters of commercial confidence between the Department and the company concerned.

Lead Batteries

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans his Department has to ensure that the level of lead batteries currently recycled is maintained and increased.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware that a combination of factors, including the current low price of lead, is reported by lead acid battery recyclers to be making their recovery operations increasingly uneconomic. On 5 May my Department issued a consultation paper seeking views on the options open to the United Kingdom for implementing the Directive on Batteries and Accumulators Containing Certain Dangerous Substances (91/157/EEC). This explores the possibilities for maintaining and increasing the traditionally high United Kingdom recycling rate for lead acid batteries. Officials recently met the battery recyclers and their representative organisation, the Lead Development Association, and encouraged them to make proposals as part of their response to this consultation paper.

Swan Hunter

Mr. Trotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade whether he will make an application to the European Commission to allow payments to be made from the shipbuilding intervention fund to Swan Hunter.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have written today to European Commissioner van Miert to ask him to reconsider the eligibility of British warship yards for the shipbuilding intervention fund.

British Coal Superannuation Scheme

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the level in each year from 1983 of the social cost grant provided to British Coal to help it meet the cost of additional contributions to its staff superannuation scheme in respect of early pensions and pensions for redundant miners; if he will provide full details of the terms and conditions associated with these grants; and what provision is made for alteration of social cost grant levels if British Coal meets its contributions by using part of the surplus in its pension fund.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 19 April 1993]:* Grant provided to British Coal with respect to the staff superannuation scheme has been as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1983-84	3·9
1984-85	9·1
1985-86	12·5
1986-87	27·4
1987-88	47·6
1988-89	55·3
1989-90	59·3
1990-91	68·7
1991-92	72·1
1992-93	80·4
Total	436·3

Grant payments have been made under the relevant provisions of the Coal Industry Acts 1965, 1967 and 1987 and Coal Industry (Restructuring Grant) Orders 1987 to 1992. Grant will continue to be paid in respect of eligible expenditure by British Coal.

SCOTLAND

Police Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take the necessary steps to arrange for the prefix royal to be added to each of the police services in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Woodlands

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *177*, whether any access agreements have been made or proposed since October 1991 in respect of any woodlands sold by the Forestry Commission before that date.

Sir Hector Monro: The arrangements for securing public access to woodlands sold by the Forestry Commission were introduced in October 1991 and could not apply to land sold before that date.

Forestry Commission

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out his current targets for the sale of Forestry Commission land in the United Kingdom in the current year and for each of the next three years.

Sir Hector Monro: As announced in Cm 2214, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1993-94 to 1995-96 for the Departments of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Forestry Commission" (table 13.10), the Commission plans to sell 15,000 hectares of forest land in the current financial year and in each of the next two years. The sales programme for 1996-97 is under consideration.

Agencies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those bodies with executive agency status which are responsible to him; what plans he has to give executive agency status to any other Department or public body responsible to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have responsibility for the following executive agencies:

Agency	Launch Date	Chief Executive
Registers of Scotland	1 April 1990	Mr. James Barron
Historic Scotland	1 April 1991	Mr. Graeme Munro
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	1 April 1991	Mr. Andrew MacLeod
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	1 April 1992	Dr. Robert Hay
Scottish Prison Service	1 April 1993	Mr. Edward Frizzell
Scottish Record Office	1 April 1993	Mr. Patrick Cadell
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	1 April 1993	Mr. Norman MacLeod

Chief executives respond, on my behalf, to letters and written parliamentary questions from hon. Members on operational issues within their sphere of responsiblity as set out in the agency's framework document. A copy of each framework document is available in the House Libraries.

I announced on 18 November 1992, c. *271*, that the fisheries research service of the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department is under consideration for executive agency status. Other candidates may be announced later this year. It is the Government's intention that all executive agency candidates will have been identified by the end of 1993 and to have launched them by mid-1995—end 1994 and mid-1996 in Northern Ireland.

Energy Conservation

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he plans to take following the recent study by Scottish Enterprise on energy conservation in the domestic sector.

Mr. Stewart: Scottish Enterprise was co-sponsor of a study of the use of energy in Scotland. This study has not yet been published.

Rape and Sexual Assault

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce legislation to alter the range of sentences open to the courts in cases of rape and sexual assault.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In Scotland rape, and most other sexual assaults, are common law offences where the maximum sentences available to the court are not laid down in statute but determined only by the maximum sentencing power of the court in which a case is heard. Where a case is heard on indictment, a sheriff sitting with a jury may impose a sentence of up to three years' imprisonment or remit the case to the High Court for a higher sentence if he believes this to be appropriate. A judge in the High Court may impose a sentence of up to life imprisonment. We believe, therefore, that there are already appropriate penalties available to deal with even the most serious cases.

Wild Plants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the common and botanical names of wild plants which are currently categorised in Scotland as *(a)* protected and *(b)* endangered species; what measures he has in place to protect such species; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides protection for all wild plants. The subset of endangered or rare species is identified in schedule 8 to the Act, as varied by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Variation of Schedules) Order 1988 (S.I. 1988 No. 288) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Variation of Schedules 5 and 8) Order 1992 (S.I. 1992 No. 2350).

It is an offence under section 13 of the Act for any unauthorised person to uproot intentionally any wild plant. In the case of the plants listed in schedule 8, it is an offence for any person intentionally to pick, uproot or destroy any example.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of abattoirs in Scotland and their combined average throughput in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1991 and *(e)* 1992; and what are the most recent figures available.

Sir Hector Monro: The information requested is as follows:

Year	Number of abattoirs[1]	Average throughput per abattoir (LUs)[2]
1970	n/a	n/a
1980	66	17,693
1990	51	24,600
1991	50	26,477
1992	48	27,195

In 1993, 44 abattoirs in Scotland were licensed under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

[1] This excludes the small remote island abattoirs which generally operate for a short season each year and have a very low throughput when open.

[2] One LU (livestock unit)—one adult cattle/calf or seven sheep or three pigs.

Islands Shipping Services

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase subsidies for shipping services to Orkney and Shetland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I announced on 17 December 1992, at column *466*, subsidy provision for shipping services

totalling £15,129 million in 1993-94, of which provision for services to and from Orkney and Shetland amounted to £6·679 million. I now intend to make available a further £1·934 million in the current year to increase the amount of subsidy available for services to Orkney and Shetland in 1993-94 to £8·613 million. The additional assistance will be provided to P and O Scottish Ferries Ltd. to enable it to maintain the present level of roll-on/roll-off services in respect of passengers and cars. The assistance will enable P and O to increase their commercial tariffs for passengers and cars, while keeping net tariffs, after tariff rebate subsidy, to users of the service unchanged. The increases in commercial tariffs are necessary to enable continued provision of the present level of services. No change is being made in subsidies to freight services.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he intends to make regarding shipping services to the Scottish islands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have decided to review the present arrangements under which I provide financial assistance to maintain lifeline shipping services to Orkney, Shetland, the Inner and Outer Hebrides and in the Clyde estuary. I also propose to review options for the future organisation and structure of Caledonian MacBrayne including the possible scope for introducing private sector participation in the provision of Caledonian MacBrayne's services.

Options to be studied will include continued public sector ownership of Caledonian MacBrayne as well as privatisation options; in the latter I will wish to explore the scope for greater employee involvement. I believe that the time is ripe for a further study of Caledonian MacBrayne following the transfer of the company's ownership to me in 1990.

The Government remain committed to providing continued financial support for lifeline shipping services to ensure that services can be provided at a cost to users which is consistent with the need to maintain and improve economic and social conditions in the islands.

The primary objective of these reviews is to explore the scope for improving the cost-effectiveness of the present arrangements in ways which are consistent with safeguarding the interests of the users of the services. I see greater efficiency and effectiveness in subsidy and service provision as leading to better services for the consumer, and wish to make it clear that our overall aim is to ensure that services are maintained and improved, and not in any way downgraded.

The Scottish Office Industry Department will shortly be inviting tenders for the necessary studies which will inform these reviews from suitable firms of economic and financial consultants.

Cockburnspath Bypass (Wind Levels)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to receive the study to be conducted by Strathclyde university on the monitoring of wind levels at the newly constructed Cockburnspath bypass; and if he will publish the results of the study in full;

(2) what detailed proposals he has to divert vehicles prone to high wind levels off the newly constructed Cockburnspath bypass during abnormal wind conditions, indicating what vehicles would be affected and what the alternative route would be.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:*

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 13 May 1993, col *487-88*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has on the relative hazards of wind levels at the newly constructed Cockburnspath bypass compared with other parts of the A1.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:*

The Scottish Office received a record of all accidents on the trunk road network which have been reported to the police. Abnormal wind strength was a contributory factor in the three recorded accidents which occurred on the Cockburnspath bypass on 21 January this year. Over the previous three years there has been only one other recorded accident on the A1 between Edinburgh and Newcastle where wind strength was a contributory factor. This occurred at Skateraw, just north of Torness power station, in February 1990. None of these accidents involved personal injury.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about his Department since April 1989; and how many have been accepted.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:*

The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs has published one report since April 1989 on which the Government have yet to respond. Other Select Committees have made 21 recommendations specifically affecting my Department. Of these 20 have been accepted, in whole or part, by the Government or have been noted where no further action was sought.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with COSLA concerning the consequences for regional, island and district councils of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the acquired rights directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* None.

Policing

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for public consultation concerning those parts of the forthcoming report of the Sheehy inquiry into policing in the United Kingdom which relate specifically to Scotland's police forces; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The report of the inquiry into police responsibilities and rewards will be circulated to all interested bodies, including those covering Scottish interests, as soon as it is published. My right hon. Friend will welcome comment from those in Scotland on any aspect of the report.

Prisons

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the budgeted annual cost per prisoner place at *(a)* HM prison Greenock and *(b)* other prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The budgeted annual cost per prisoner place, including capital expenditure, at HM prison, Greenock, for 1993-94, is £30,665. This compares with a budgeted Scottish prison service average figure of £28,314 for the same year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Global Environmental Facility

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation his Department will have at the global environmental facility's participants' meeting in Beijing from 26 to 28 May; what discussions he has had with the World bank in regard to the global environmental facility meeting; and if he will make a statement on the way in which the global environmental facility is accountable to supporter states.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom delegation will be led by the deputy secretary of the Overseas Development Administration, supported by officials from the Department of the Environment and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The chairman of the Global Environment Facility has consulted United Kingdom officials on issues which will be discussed in Beijing. The GEF is accountable to participating states at the meetings of GEF's governing body, the participants assembly.

UN Development Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he received a copy of the "1993 Human Development" reports of the United Nations Development Programme; and what action he intends to take in regard to its recommendations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The 1993 human development report is being published by the United Nations development programme this week. We welcome the report as a useful contribution to the development debate. We are studying the report and its proposals with great interest, and shall take appropriate account of them.

St. Helena

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much aid has been given to St. Helena in each year since 1979.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The figures for St. Helena are:

	Number
1979	3,935
1980	3,795
1981	4,062
1982	5,834
1983	6,533
1984	7,471
1985	9,354
1986	9,202
1987	12,241
1987-88	11,057
1988-89	20,524
1989-90	24,239
1990-91	11,759
1991-92	9,147

Note: The method of recording aid expenditure was changed from a calendar year to a financial year basis in 1987-88.

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how Her Majesty's Government evaluates the Government of Indonesia in relation to his policy relating aid to good Government.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We review regularly the performance of all aid recipients, including Indonesia, against the criteria of our good government policy.

In the case of Indonesia, although there are human rights concerns which we regularly discuss with the Indonesian authorities, British aid, which concentrates on tropical forestry, education, energy efficiency, economic infrastructure and public administration is, in our view, used to good effect. Indonesia has a good track record of sound economic management and has done much to reduce absolute poverty over the last two decades.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's position on the World bank's policy in relation to the development of a nuclear power industry in Indonesia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The World bank is not involved in the development of a nuclear power industry in Indonesia.

Family Planning

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are designated as priority areas for family planning and population assistance; what criteria are used to choose these countries; and what plans there are to involve more countries.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda are designated as priority countries for United Kingdom family planning and population assistance. The selection criteria used to choose these countries were: the unmet demand for reproductive health and family planning services; their gross national product per capita; and the potential effectiveness of United Kingdom aid for population programmes.

The list of priority countries is kept under regular review. We also currently provide population assistance to Ghana, Namibia, South Africa, (via an NGO), Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nepal.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and which non-governmental organisations received support for family planning and related projects through the joint funding scheme in 1991 and 1992; what were the projects; and in which countries they took place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92 a total of seven non-governmental organisations

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received support through the joint funding scheme for projects which were primarily for family planning and related activities. The details are set out in the tables.

Agency	*Country*	*Project name*	*£*
1990-91			
Africa Now	Kenya	Chogoria Family Planning Programme	9,350
AID	India	Family Planning Project	46,468
Marie Stopes International	Bangladesh	Family Planning, Preventative Health Care	43,808
Marie Stopes International	Ethiopia	Maternal and Reproductive Health Clinic	57,237
Marie Stopes International	India	Contraceptive Social Marketing	69,992
Marie Stopes International	India	Workplace Family Planning and Preventative Health Care—Employees and Dependents	43,258
Marie Stopes International	India	Soap Drama—Family Life/Responsible Sexual Behaviour	13,250
Marie Stopes International	India	Brass Tacks Family Planning Programme	31,434
Marie Stopes International	Kenya	National Youth Service	47,278
Marie Stopes International	Lesotho	Creating a Corps of Village-Based Family Planning Education/Motivators	33,498
Marie Stopes International	Malawi	Health Programme for Poor Women and Families	49,507
Marie Stopes International	Nicaragua	Workplace Preventative Maternal Health and Family Planning	40,699
Marie Stopes International	Pakistan	Lahore Based Reproductive Health Extension Services	24,777
Marie Stopes International	Sierra Leone	Work Based Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning	34,744
Marie Stopes International	Swaziland	Male Oriented Family Planning	21,647
Marie Stopes International	Zimbabwe	Training Programme Zimbabwe Association Women's Clubs	41,180
OXFAM	Senegal	Family Planning and Literacy	764
Population Concern	Bangladesh	Family Planning Services for the Rakhaine Tribes	11,340
Population Concern	Bangladesh	Integrated Family Planning Health and Education	45,214
Population Concern	Caribbean	Three Workshops Family Planning Fieldworkers	25,512
Population Concern	Caribbean	Towards Accreditation Sex Education in Caribbean Schools	72,370
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Family Planning Training for Rural Women Development Agents	41,675
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Training of Health Assistants	43,140
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Development of a Manual-Rural Women Development Workers	14,120
Population Concern	Nepal	Nawalparasi Women's Development	18,425
Population Concern	Pakistan	Family Planning Through Community Institutions	32,195
Population Concern	Pakistan	Training for Women Development Workers	31,715
UKFSP	Fiji	Family Planning	12,318
TOTAL			956,915

1991-92			
Africa Now	Gambia	Tanji Community Family Planning	11,645
Marie Stopes International	Ethiopia	Condom Social Marketing Family Planning/AIDS Programme Urban Couples	37,249
Marie Stopes International	India	Family Life Education (Brass Tacks) Extension for Delhi and Lucknow	40,679
Marie Stopes International	India	Contraceptive Social Marketing	70,627
Marie Stopes International	India	Workplace Family Planning and Preventative Health Care—Employees and Dependents	62,371
Marie Stopes International	Malawi	Man to Man—Male Orientated Child Spacing/Education	70,487
Marie Stopes International	Malawi	Community Mother and Child and Family Planning—Blantyre, Lilongwe and Zomba	136,874
Marie Stopes International	Mexico	Factory Based Health Care and Family Planning Programme	49,501
Marie Stopes International	Nicaragua	Workplace Preventative Maternal Health and Family Planning	72,403
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Training of Health Assistants	22,965
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Jimma—Contraceptive Distribution by Community Health Agents and TBAs	19,760
Population Concern	Ethiopia	Yirgalem—Family Planning Education and Outreach Services	25,970
Population Concern	Gambia	Youth to Youth IEC on Adolescent Reproductive Health Management	19,865
Population Concern	India	Women's Development (Kulasekaram and Dindigul)	30,690
Population Concern	Nepal	Nawalparasi Women's Development	14,895
Population Concern	Pakistan	Family Planning Through Community Institutions	23,835
Urban Aid	Ghana	Family Planning Project	20,193
OXFAM	Pakistan	Family Planning Project	11,491
TOTAL			741,500

Narmada Dam

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has received from the Indian Government on public access to environmental and hydrological studies regarding the proposed Narmada dam.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are consulting the Indian authorities and the World bank about their plans to make environmental and hydrological studies relating to the Sardar Sarovar dam project publicly available.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any of the local cost aid provided by the Government to India for the Narmada dam scheme has been used to buy any British military equipment.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British Government have not provided any local costs assistance to the Narmada dam scheme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animals (Notifiable Diseases)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the notifiable diseases of animals.

Mr. Soames: The following diseases of animals are notifiable in Great Britain:

AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS
AFRICAN SWINE FEVER
ANTHRAX
AUJESZKY'S DISEASE
BLUE TONGUE
BOVINE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHY
BRUCELLA MELITENSIS
BRUCELLOSIS
CATTLE PLAGUE in Ruminants and Swine
CLASSICAL SWINE FEVER
CONTAGIOUS AGALACTIA
CONTAGIOUS EPIDIDYMITIS
CONTAGIOUS EQUINE METRITIS
DOURINE in Horses, Asses, Mules and Zebras
ENZOOTIC BOVINE LEUKOSIS
EPIZOOTIC HAEMORRHAGIC VIRUS DISEASE
EPIZOOTIC LYMPHANGITIS in Horse, Asses and Mules
EQUINE ENCEPHALOMYELITIS
EQUINE INFECTIOUS ANAEMIA
FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE in Ruminants and Swine
FOWL PEST (FOWL PLAGUE, NEWCASTLE DISEASE AND PARAMYXOVIRUS) in Poultry of all kinds
GLANDERS AND FARCY in Horses, Asses and Mules
GOAT POX
LUMPY SKIN DISEASE
PARAMYXOVIRUS in Pigeons
PESTE DES PETITS RUMINANT
PLEURO-PNEUMONIA in Cattle
RABIES
RIFT VALLEY FEVER
SCRAPIE
SHEEP POX
SHEEP SCAB
SWINE VESICULAR DISEASE (SVD)
TESCHEN DISEASE of Pigs
TUBERCULOSIS in Cattle
TUBERCULOSIS in Deer
VESICULAR STOMATITIS
VIRAL HAEMORRHAGIC DISEASE of Rabbits
WARBLE FLY

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of abattoirs in England and their combined average throughput in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1991 and *(e)* 1992; and what are the most recent figures available.

Mr. Soames: Annual statistics derived from the survey of English slaughterhouses are given in the table. Comparative figures are not available for the years 1970 and 1980—details for 1985 are therefore included:

Year	*Number of abattoirs open*[1]	*Average throughput per abattoir (LUs)*[2]
1985	839	10,742
1990	659	12,730
1991	599	14,373
1992	545	15,278

[1] Open at any time during the year.
[2] 1 LU (livestock unit) = 1 adult cattle/calf or 7 sheep or 3 pigs.

The most recent figures available show that 438 abattoirs in England are currently licensed to operate under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

Fisheries Decommissioning

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposed decommissioning scheme for fishing vessels.

Mr. Curry: The Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1993 was laid before Parliament today.

The Government have already announced that funding of £25 million will be made available over three years for decommissioning fishing vessels as part of the package of conservation measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 27 February 1992.

This scheme allows the first tranche of payments to be made during the 1993-94 financial year. The rules may be changed in subsequent years in the light of our experience with this first year's scheme.

There will be no preset rates of grant. Vessel owners are invited to submit tenders for the amount of decommissioning grant for which they would be prepared to scrap their vessel and surrender its licence. Applications will be ranked in terms of pounds per vessel capacity unit.

To be eligible for decommissioning grants vessels must meet the following criteria:

(a) The vessel must be registered in the United Kingdom. It must have been acquired by the applicant(s) prior to 27 February 1992 and must be over 10 years of age;
(b) The vessel must have spent at least 100 days at sea on fishing trips during 1991 and at least 100 days in 1992;
(c) The vessel must be over 10 m in overall length and hold a valid fishing licence. The descriptions of fish that may be taken under the licence must be the same or more extensive than under the license held on 27 February 1992. The licence and any entitlements associated with it will be permanently extinguished when the vessel is decommissioned.
(d) The vessel must be seaworthy: vessels over 12 m in registered length should have had a valid Department of Transport safety certificate on 1 April 1993.
(e) Grants will only be paid for scrapping vessels. The applicant must provide proof that the vessel has been removed from the Department of Transport Register of Fishing Vessels and has been scrapped within the European Community before and grant is paid;
(f) An application for a grant must be approved before the vessel is scrapped or the vessel will not be eligible for a grant;
(g) Successful applicants must have submitted proof of scrapping, de-registration and have surrendered all licences in respect of the vessel before 1 March 1994 otherwise they lose their right to a decommissioning grant.

Decommissioning complements the measures we are taking under the Sea Fish (Conservation) Act 1992 to control fishing effort. It will help to ensure that the United Kingdom meets its MAGP targets. I believe that the scheme represents a significant contribution to help the industry to achieve the reductions in the fleet that are necessary if we are to secure a viable future for fishermen.

Fishermen are therefore invited to apply for decommissioning grants. Application forms and accompanying explanatory leaflets are available in local fishery offices. The deadline for receipt of application is 9 July.

Eastern Sea Fisheries Joint Committee

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will state the reasons for the time taken to reimburse the eastern sea fisheries joint committee under EC Council decision 89/631.

Mr. Curry: The average time for reimbursement of grant under Council decision 89/631 is at least three months after the application has been forwarded to the Commission. The committee's first application for grant was dated 25 February 1993, and the moneys have been paid into the committee's bank account.

Sellafield

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on radioactive pollution from Sellafield.

Mr. Curry: The Minister and the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution have received approximately 83,000 representations in response to consultation on draft authorisations to discharge nuclear wastes from BNFL Sellafield. These are currently being considered.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many claims for payments under the sheep annual premium scheme were submitted after the prescribed date.

Mr. Curry: A total of 1,082 claims are estimated to have been received by my Department after the advertised closing dates of the first and second application periods under the 1993 sheep annual premium scheme. This represents about 2·6 per cent. of the total number of claims submitted. We repeatedly emphasise to farmers the importance of lodging their claims by the closing date.

Pesticides

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to undertake a review of pesticide usage in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Government policy is that the use of pesticides should be limited to the minimum necessary for the effective control of pests compatible with the protection of human health and the environment. This policy of minimisation is pursued through the statutory approvals system which sets maximum dose rates and tests efficacy claims and is backed by controls on use; surveillance monitoring of residues; usage surveys; and investigation of wildlife incidents. The Government also support an extensive research programme to investigate ways of minimising use. These policies have already led to significant reductions in the weight of active ingredients applied and we shall continue to pursue them in the future.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

Mr. Curry: The Agriculture Committee has published 16 reports since April 1989. The Government's responses are contained in the following documents, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Supply of beer. HC 528, 1989
Implementation of the new beef regime. HC 402, 1989
Land Use and Forestry. HC 16 1, 1990
Fish farming in the UK. HC 141, 1990
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. CM 1328, 1990
Salmonella in Eggs. CM 993, 1990
MAFF Departmental Report. HC 326, 1991
Animals in transit. HC 45, 1991
Microwave Ovens. CM 1482, 1991
Disposal of fallen livestock. CM 1778, 1991
Commodity markets in the 1990s. HC 98, 1992
The trade gap in food and drink. CM 1982, 1992
Arrangements for the importation of bananas into the United Kingdom. HC 452, 1993

Peat

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on replacement of peat with alternative materials.

Mr. Curry: The Government are concerned to ensure that the United Kingdom horticultural industry continues to have access to efficient and economic plant growth media. Currently the use of peat is essential to enable the United Kingdom's horticultural industry to remain competitive. The Government have welcomed positive actions by the horticultural and landscape industries to examine and use suitable alternatives to peat—in particular in the amenity and retail sectors. Government Departments are supporting research into the needs of plants for growing media, and into alternatives to peat and the place of recycled materials.

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of IACS forms were returned by 15 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: In order to ensure that every potential applicant received an IACS information pack, forms and explanatory booklets were distributed to all holdings in England and Wales. The number returned by 15 May amounted to approximately 45 per cent. of these despatched. We recognised that some holdings would not be eligible for aid under the CAP schemes covered by IACS but we were not willing to take the risk of missing potential claimants.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 2 April to the hon. Member for Carlisle, *Official Report*, column *454*, when he expects to introduce the scheme for public access in ESAs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We plan to introduce the new measures to encourage public access in environmentally sensitive areas during the coming winter.

Science and Technology

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how his Department contributes to the Government's policy for science and technology.

Mr. Gummer: My Ministry is a science-based Department. It employs more graduate scientists and engineers than any other civil Department. The continual availability of reliable scientific information and expertise is essential to me for the sound formation, appraisal, implementation and evaluation of the Ministry's policies.

These are concerned with major aspects both of quality of life and economic performance, including public safety, animal welfare, environmental enhancement, and improving the economic performance of the agricultural, fishing and food industries.

The Ministry's scientific and technical activities range over provision of timely and objective specialist advice to Ministers, monitoring and surveillance, scientific investigation, formulation and management of policy-related research programmes, and promotion of technology transfer.

The Ministry will continue to depend on its own scientific services and those from external contractors in the public and private sectors. The Ministry's choice of supplier will in every case be determined according to its judgment of suitability, scientific capability and value for money to meet its policy needs.

I welcome the publication today of the White Paper "Science and Technology" by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and in particular its recognition of the key role of civil Departments in determining their own needs and commissioning work from suppliers who compete to meet their specifications. I very much support the White Paper's emphasis on ensuring that the status of research establishments in the public sector is optimal for Departments to obtain the services which they need.

My Department has been in the forefront of this process. I have already carefully reviewed the options for ownership and management of the Ministry's scientific facilities, the outcome of which has been the recent establishment of the Central Veterinary Laboratory, ADAS and the Central Science Laboratory as departmental agencies, and decisions that the food laboratories should acquire a similar status within the Central Science Laboratory. The scrutiny announced in today's White Paper will take account of such reviews which have already been completed, recognising that science and technology are integral to the missions of Departments and that changes should not weaken the effective provision of scientific expertise and advice.

PRIME MINISTER

Domicile Status

Ms Harman: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to amend the rules concerning domicile status in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: The Government have no immediate plans to introduce legislation on this subject.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Job Applicants (Travel Expenses)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek to amend existing legislation and regulations to enable job applicants in Northern Ireland who have been short listed for a second interview, after an initial interview, to claim travelling expenses for the purpose of attending a second interview.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. J. S. Crozier. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Crozier to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 25 May 1993:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will seek to amend existing legislation and regulations to enable job applicants in Northern Ireland who have been shortlisted for a second interview, after an initial interview, to claim travelling expenses for the purpose of attending a second interview. The Secretary of State has passed your question to me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency, for reply.

The programme which relates to your enquiry is the Travel to Interview Scheme. This is essentially a small scheme with limited resources and it is therefore not possible to help at every stage of a selection procedure. Where an employer needs to see a jobseeker on more than one occasion the employer might be expected to help meet the cost if the jobseeker cannot do so. By conserving our resources for providing help to attend the first interview more applications can be accepted and more jobseekers helped to find employment.

However the scheme is currently under review and the eligibility conditions are being examined to see whether, within the limited resources that are available, there are ways of helping more people more effectively.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to change the title of the RUC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mates: I have no plans to change the title of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the adjective Royal was given to the police service in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mates: The prefix "Royal" was granted to the Royal Ulster Constabulary on its formation.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Roman Catholic members of the RUC have been murdered by republican criminals in each of the past 25 years.

Mr. Mates: It would not be appropriate to provide this information since it might lead to the identification of the religious affiliation of individual officers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of the RUC are known to have been Roman Catholic in each of the past 25 years.

Mr. Mates: Statistics regarding the community background of RUC officers are not available prior to 1990.

Since 1990 the percentage of officers with a Roman Catholic background is as follows:—

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*[1]1993*
RUC (Regular)	7·75	7·72	7·84	7·87
RUC Reserve[2]	5·45	5·82	5·92	6·14

[1] As at 17 May 1993.
[2] Full-time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the ratio of RUC average earnings to average earnings in Northern Ireland in each of the past 25 years.

Mr. Mates: The information is available only for each of the past 21 years and is given in the following table:

Year	Average earnings RUC[1] £s/annum	Average earnings Northern Ireland[2] £s/annum	Ratio average earnings (NI) v. average RUC earnings
1992-93	32,954	not available	—
1991-92	31,130	15,705	1:1·98
1990-91	28,013	14,346	1:1·95
1989-90	25,342	13,351	1:1·90
1988-89	23,080	12,166	1:1·90
1987-88	22,126	11,334	1:1·95
1986-87	19,872	10,502	1:1·89
1985-86	17,874	9,596	1:1·86
1984-85	17,004	9,074	1:1·87
1983-84	15,803	8,642	1:1·83
1982-83	14,957	7,947	1:1·88
1981-82	14,281	7,468	1:1·91
1980-81	11,648	6,831	1:1·70
1979-80	10,055	5,993	1:1·68
1978-79	7,876	4,919	1:1·60
1977-78	6,937	4,292	1:1·62
1976-77	5,891	3,797	1:1·55
1975-76	5,366	3,613	1:1·48
1974-75	4,608	2,881	1:1·60
1973-74	3,859	2,249	1:1·71
1972-73	3,421	1,949	1:1·75
1971-72	3,245	1,696	1:1·91

[1] RUC average earnings are for regular members of the force.
[2] Northern Ireland average earnings are as determined by the Department of Economic Development Annual New Earnings Survey.

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects Lord Colville's report on the operation in 1992 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991 to be available.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am happy to say that Lord Colville's 1992 report has been published today. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House today.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Reception

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what guidance he has given to *(a)* the Independent Television Commission and *(b)* the BBC about improving TV reception along the Lancashire and Yorkshire border so as to ensure reception of programmes in Pendle.

Mr. Brooke: It is for the broadcasters to determine the engineering priorities aimed at extending or improving reception of programmes to specific areas.

County Hall and Battersea Power Station

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last received a report from English Heritage on the current condition of *(a)* County hall and *(b)* Battersea power station.

Mr. Brooke: I have not received and do not expect any report from English Heritage on county hall while the building remains in good condition.

I received a report on Battersea power station in February following a further inspection by officers of English Heritage which showed no significant deterioration in its condition. I understand that a further inspection took place at the end of March and that English Heritage is expecting shortly to appoint consultant engineers to conduct a more detailed examination of the building.

Royal Palaces (Fire Protection)

Mr. Trend: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he will publish the report of the inquiry into fire protection measures for the royal palaces.

Mr. Brooke: I have today published the report and have also placed copies in the Library of the House. This follows from my announcement on 14 January that I had invited Sir Alan Bailey to chair an inquiry into the adequacy of fire protection measures at the royal palaces for which I have a financial responsibility, following the tragic fire at Windsor castle last November.

I am very grateful to Sir Alan Bailey and to Philip Kilshaw and Donald Insall, who assisted him in his task, for producing a thorough and well-reasoned report. It contains a full and definitive account of the Windsor fire and identifies the lessons to be learnt from the fire. The main part of the report contains a comprehensive assessment of the strategy needed to protect these royal palaces from fire, while at the same time preserving their historic fabric. It properly considers the risks, costs and value for money aspects of fire protection measures.

I am glad to hear that the inquiry team "found basic fire safety precautions generally in place, and a programme of work already in train to improve fire protection". However the report makes clear that a number of further measures are desirable. Both I and the royal household accept the general strategy recommended in the report as sensible and necessary. Indeed many of the recommendations are already being implemented or planned. Those measures which the inquiry team consider should be implemented at once will be so implemented. This includes work at the White tower, which has already started. Detailed professional surveys will be or have already been undertaken for each palace, to recommend safety improvements such as compartmentation and fire stopping consistent with preserving the historic fabric. Automatic fire detection systems will be installed in each of the palaces which do not at present have such a system. The timing of these and other protection measures will be decided in the light of the findings of survey reports, the scope for adjusting planned works programmes to accommodate additional fire protection measures, and the availability of funds.

The royal household and the Historic Royal Palaces Agency, which are directly responsible for managing most of these properties, will now be considering the report in detail.

EDUCATION

Parents' Guide

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what expenditure there has been on the production and distribution of his Department's publication "Testing: the Facts", including the parents' guide 1993-94, "How is Your Child Doing at School?"

Mr. Forth: The cost of the production and distribution of "Testing: the Facts", including "How is Your Child Doing at School?", is estimated at £9,100.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when he expects to publish the information requested on the number of telephone calls and written requests he had received by 10 May for "How is Your Child Doing at School"; and how many copies were distributed in each of the 10 languages listed in the advertisement on 27 April.

Mr. Forth: The campaign to provide parents with information about testing has not yet ended. My right hon. Friend will announce the number of requests received in due course. An initial distribution of 981,000 copies of the leaflet was made to schools, libraries and local education authorities.

Assisted Places

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will make a statement about the level of parental contributions to the fees of pupils in the assisted places scheme in the next academic year.

Mr. Forth: Remission of tuition fees under the assisted places scheme is dependent on the level of fees at participating schools and the amount parents can afford to contribute. Subject to parliamentary approval, the parental contribution scales will be adjusted upwards for the school year 1993-94 as set out in the table. Where the relevant income for the appropriate financial year does not exceed £9,225 the tuition fees will be wholly remitted.

Part of relevant income to which percentage applies	*One assisted pupil Per cent.*	*Each of two assisted pupils Per cent.*	*Each of three assisted pupils Per cent.*
That part which exceeds £9,059 but does not exceed £9,850	9·00	6·75	5·25
That part (if any) which exceeds £9,850 but does not exceed £10,655	12·00	9·00	7·00
That part (if any) which exceeds £10,655 but does not exceed £12,250	15·00	11·25	8·75
That part (if any) which exceeds £12,250 but does not exceed £14,707	21·00	15·75	12·25
That part (if any) which exceeds £14,707 but does not exceed £17,912	24·00	18·00	14·00
That part (if any) which exceeds £17,912	33·00	24·75	19·25

Special Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will list on an annual basis the number of times the procedures under section 14 of the Education Act 1981 have been used, indicating the local education authorities involved, the special schools proposed for closure, the ones that were closed and the alternative provision made for them.

Mr. Forth: The information is not readily available in the form requested. The following list identifies special schools closed under section 14 procedures for each calendar year 1988-1992, including those which formed part of wider reorganisation proposals, where for example the establishment of a new special school following closure proposals involving several schools. Before approving proposals for the closure of special schools the Secretary of State must be satisfied that the alternative arrangements for pupils are satisfactory.

For the period 1983-1988, "Statistics of Education" published annually by HMSO show the total number of LEA maintained special schools.

Special Schools closed 1988-1992 under proposals under section 14 of the Education Act 1981

	Date of closure
1988	
Cheshire	
Torpenhow School	31 August 1988
Cleveland	
Summerhouse Schools	1 January 1988
Cumbria	
Roa Island School	31 August 1988
Derbyshire	
Frank Merrifield	31 August 1988
Devon	
Withycombe House School	31 July 1988
Ratcliffe School	31 July 1988
Essex	
Branwood	31 July 1988
Dacre	31 July 1988
Hampshire	
Bursledon Hospital School	31 December 1988
Lancashire	
Hendon Brook School	1 January 1988
Derby School	31 August 1988
Leeds	
Armley Lodge School	31 August 1988
Cardinal Square School	31 August 1988
Inner London (before abolition of ILEA)	
Heathermount School	31 August 1988
Whittingdon School	31 August 1988
New River School	31 August 1988
Nathaniel Heckford School	31 August 1988
Winceby House School	31 August 1988

	Date of closure
Montford House School	22 July 1988
Bromley	
Cheyne Hospital School	31 August 1988
Hillingdon	
Park Place School	31 August 1988
Hounslow	
Heston School for the Deaf	31 October 1988
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	
The Silverhill School	31 August 1988
Condercum House School	31 August 1988
Eastview School	31 August 1988
St. Peter's School	31 August 1988
Sheriff Leas School	31 August 1988
Westlands School	31 August 1988
Brunswick Beech School	31 August 1988
Castle Dene School	31 August 1988
St. Aiden's School	31 August 1988
Kenton Lodge School	31 August 1988
North Yorkshire	
Friarage Hospital School	31 December 1988
Oldham	
Greenbank School	27 May 1988
Oxfordshire	
Smith Hospital	22 July 1988
Rotherham	
The Oaks School	31 August 1988
Sheffield	
Northern General Hospital School	31 August 1988
Limb Lane School	31 August 1988
Todwick Grange School	31 August 1988
Solihull	
Swanswell	31 August 1988
Stockport	
Shawfold School	31 August 1988
Woodlands School	31 August 1988
Sunderland	
Maplewood School	31 July 1988
Milton Hall School	31 July 1988
Humbledon School	31 July 1988
Glebe School	31 August 1988
Copt Hill School	31 August 1988
Stannington School	31 July 1988
Wellbank School	31 July 1988
Walsall	
Queslett	31 December 1988
1989	
Bradford	
Langley School	31 August 1989
Cheshire	
Capenhurst Grange School	31 August 1989
Cumbria	
Brookside	31 August 1989
Devon	
Dryden School	31 December 1989
Dudley	
Mount School	31 December 1989
Hertfordshire	
Butts Close	31 March 1989
Homefield	31 March 1989

	Date of closure
Liverpool	
Crookhey Hall School	31 August 1989
Inner London (before abolition of ILEA)	
Shephall Manor School	31 August 1989
Outer London	
Newham	
Regent School	31 March 1989
Waltham Forest	
Waltham Forest School	31 August 1989
Grosvenor House School	31 August 1989
Nottinghamshire	
Harlow Wood Hospital	31 January 1989
Sheffield	
Beeley Wood Senior School	31 August 1989
Stockport	
Beacon School	31 August 1989
Surrey	
Farmstead	31 December 1989
Warwickshire	
St. Michael's	31 August 1989
Gresham	31 August 1989
Wirral	
Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital School	31 August 1989
1990	
Avon	
Highwood Hospital School	31 December 1990
Berkshire	
Evelyn Fox	31 July 1990
Bradford	
McMillan School	31 August 1990
Thorn Garth School	31 August 1990
Cambridgeshire	
Orton Hall	5 November 1990
Cumbria	
Roundhills School	31 August 1990
Hertfordshire	
Brandles Close	1 September 1990
Broxbournebury	31 August 1990
Hillside	31 August 1990
Knowsley	
Albert Hambleton School	31 August 1990
Northfield School	31 August 1990
Arncliff School	31 August 1990
Millbridge School	31 March 1990
Camberley School	31 July 1990
Inner London Boroughs	
Camden	
Holly Court School	8 August 1990
Outer London	
Barnet	
Mapledown School	31 August 1990
Oakleigh School	31 August 1990
Brent	
Frank Wyeth School	31 May 1990
Ealing	
Red House School	31 December 1990

	Date of closure
Havering	
Havering Grange School	31 August 1990
Hounslow	
Martindale School	31 August 1990
Manchester	
Alice Briggs House	31 August 1990
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	
Freeman Hospital School	1 January 1990
Shropshire	
Petton Hall	1 September 1990
Surrey	
Rowley Bristow	31 July 1990
Claybourne	31 August 1990
Temple Court	31 August 1990
Leacroft	31 August 1990
Greystone	31 August 1990
Bakers Croft	31 August 1990
Wolverhampton	
Kingston Hall	31 August 1990
1991	
Barnsley	
Springwood School	30 July 1991
Cumbria	
Richard Brunskill School	31 December 1991
H. K. Campbell School	31 August 1991
Dorset	
Westbourne School	30September 1991
East Sussex	
Hill House	31 August 1991
Essex	
Ogilvie	31 August 1991
Gateshead	
Hindley Hall School	31 August 1991
Hereford/Worcester	
Pudlestone Court	31 August 1991
Lancashire	
Valley School	31 August 1991
Belmont School	31 August 1991
Leeds	
East End Park School	31 August 1991
Grafton School	31 August 1991
Woodside School	31 August 1991
Elmete Hall School	31 August 1991
Roundhay Lodge School	31 August 1991
Cliff House School	31 August 1991
Victoria Park School	31 August 1991
Springfield School	31 August 1991
Nowell School	31 August 1991
Stanningley School	31 August 1991
Pennyfield School	31 August 1991
Fearnville School	31 August 1991
Tranfield School	31 August 1991
Northways School	31 August 1991
Redwood Croft School	31 August 1991
Two Dales School	31 August 1991
Eastfield School	31 August 1991
West Oaks School	31 August 1991
Broomfield School	31 August 1991
Leicestershire	
Leicester Hospital	31 August 1991
Royal Infirmary	31 August 1991
Newham	
Lansbury School	31 January 1991
Northamptonshire	
Princess Marina	22 April 1991
Wiston	22 April 1991
Northumberland	
Riverbank School	31 December 1991
Shropshire	
Robert James Orthopaedic Hospital	31 August 1991
1992	
Calderdale	
Bermerside School	31 August 1992
Heywood School	31 August 1992
Woodbank School	31 August 1992
Hillside School	31 August 1992
Durham	
Glebe School	31 August 1992
Salters Lane School	31 August 1992
Mayfair School	31 August 1992
Dunholme School	31 August 1992
Troutslane School	31 August 1992
South View School	31 August 1992
Humberside	
Carnforth School	31 August 1992
Trinity School	31 August 1992
Inner London Boroughs (following abolition of ILEA)	
Greenwich	
Rose Cottage School	31 August 1992
Hawthorne Cottage School	31 August 1992
Manormead School	31 August 1992
Hammersmith and Fulham	
John Aird School	31 December 1992
Fernhurst School	31 December 1992
Pine End School	31 December 1992
Elizabeth Burgwin School	31 December 1992
Wedgewood School	31 December 1992
Southwark	
Woodstock School	31 August 1992
Beormund School	31 August 1992
Merton	
Ravensbury School	31 August 1992
William Wilberforce School	31 August 1992
Northamptonshire	
Firdale	1 September 1992
Sefton	
Sandfield School	31 July 1992

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will take steps to encourage headmasters to exclude disruptive pupils from school when it can be shown that the continued admission of such pupils deleteriously affects the education of other pupils in the school.

Mr. Forth: Head teachers already have the power to exclude a pupil on disciplinary grounds where they deem it an appropriate response to serious misbehaviour.

School Inspections

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many tenders OFSTED has received for the first group of schools to be inspected; and how many of these tenders have been accepted;

(2) how many school inspectors OFSTED has trained and registered to inspect secondary schools in the autumn; and what is the minimum number of school inspectors necessary to inspect schools in England and Wales every four years;

(3) how many school inspectors registered by OFSTED are currently *(a)* based in local authorities and *(b)* from private consultancies.

Mr. Forth: The arrangements for inspecting schools under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 are a matter for OFSTED.

I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average cost of a school inspection by his Department's inspectors; and what is his estimate of the average cost of a school inspection by OFSTED inspectors.

Mr. Forth: Inspections of schools formerly carried out by Her Majesty's inspectorate as part of the Department for Education varied in cost from about £4,500 to about £35,000. The cost of inspections carried out under the Education (Schools) Act in accordance with OFSTED's framework of guidance are a matter for Professor Sutherland.

I have asked Professor Sutherland to write to the hon. Member.

Disruptive Pupils

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will undertake a study of the particular staffing and building requirements of schools designed to contain and educate disruptive pupils.

Mr. Forth: We have no plans to undertake such a study.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of Sate for Education what consideration he has given to the setting up of schools where disruptive pupils can be temporarily or permanently placed.

Mr. Forth: LEAs have a power under section 56 of the Education Act 1944 to provide education otherwise than at school where they consider it necessary to meet a pupil's needs. The Education Bill now before Parliament contains provision to convert that power into a duty but it will remain for LEAs to determine the precise nature of the provision made for individual pupils in the light of the particular circumstances of each case.

Disturbed Children

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what advice has been issued through the Department for Education, the National Curriculum Council, School Examinations and Assessment Council or OFSTED about the teaching or modifying of the national curriculum for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children.

Mr. Forth: The DFE, OFSTED and NCC publications listed include advice on the teaching and disapplication of the national curriculum for children with special educational needs. DFE circular 23/89 deals specifically with emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children. The statutory orders containing attainment targets and programmes of study for the national curriculum also contain advice on children with special educational needs.

SEAC's school assessment folders regularly include guidance on the assessment of children with special educational needs, and have made specific mention of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Department for Education
National Curriculum—from Policy to Practice
Circular 5/89: The Education Reform Act 1988: the School Curriculum and Assessment
Circular 15/89: Education Reform Act 1988: Temporary Exceptions from the National Curriculum
Circular 22/89: Assessments and Statements of Special Educational Needs: Procedures within the Education, Health and Social Services
Circular 23/89: Special Schools for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

OFSTED/Her Majesty's Inspectorate
Special Needs and the National Curriculum (an annual series of reports)
The Implementations of National Curriculum Science at Key Stage 3 in Some Special Schools

National Curriculum Council
Implementing the National Curriculum—Participation by Pupils with Special Educational Needs
A Curriculum for All: Special Educational Needs in the National Curriculum
Teaching Science to Pupils with Special Educational Needs
Science and Pupils with Special Educational Needs (Key Stages 1 and 2)
Oracy and Special Educational Needs—case studies across Key Stages 1-4
Modern Foreign Languages and Special Needs
SEN Newsletter

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many schools and units for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children he has visited since assuming office.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friends and I have visited a large number of schools. As regards schools and units specifically providing for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, my right hon. Friend has visited one school for such pupils and four for pupils with other special educational needs. I have visited one school for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed pupils and two schools for pupils with other disabilities.

ENVIRONMENT

Council House Sales

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in England since May 1979.

Mr. Howard: More than 1·1 million council properties in England have been sold to sitting tenants since May 1979, under the right to buy. In Great Britain as a whole, our policy has enabled more than 1·4 million former public sector tenants to become owner occupiers.

Market Testing

15. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for extending market testing to white-collar local authority services.

Mr. Robin Squire: Last November my right hon. and learned Friend announced the Government's decision to extend compulsory competitive tendering to a wide range of local authority professional and corporate services. On 19 April this year I announced the timetable for implementation. Tendering will start from summer 1994. Detailed arrangements are now being discussed with the local authority associations and others.

Council Tax

16. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has comparing council tax levels according to political control of the local authority.

Mr. Redwood: The average band C council tax in areas under Conservative control in February 1993 is £456. This is £107 lower than the corresponding figure for Labour areas and £19 lower than the corresponding figure for Liberal Democrat areas.

Housing

17. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about unused public and private sector housing.

Sir George Young: The Government's aim is to bring a decent home within the reach of every family. To do this, it is important that we make full use of the existing housing stock and help homeless families by bringing empty property back into use.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his autumn statement last November the provision of £627 million additional resources in England in 1992-93 to boost the housing market. £577 million of this, provided through the Housing Corporation, enabled housing associations to buy some 18,000 new, empty or repossessed properties.

In addition, local authorities have been allowed to spend virtually all the capital receipts they accrue between 13 November 1992 and the end of December 1993. This represents a substantial increase in local authorities' spending power and I hope that they will make effective use of the extra receipts, particularly in the areas of renovation and maintenance which would contribute to bringing back into productive use some of the 74,000 empty local authority flats and houses.

Resources for the estate action and housing action trusts programmes—£356 million and £87 million respectively in 1993-94—will assist in reducing the number of empty units in the larger and more difficult local authority estates.

The Government are keen to stimulate growth in the private rented sector. Deregulation of rents and the availability of shorthold tenancies for new private tenancies has removed one of the constraints which previously inhibited potential landlords. We offer a number of incentives to private individuals and institutions to make underused property available for rent: we are making £25 million available over three years to encourage retailers to let flats over their shops; tax incentives have been introduced to encourage householders to take in lodgers—from April 1992 gross rental income of up to £3,250 per annum has been exempt from income tax; following the success of pilot schemes last year we have expanded the housing associations as managing agents nationwide; and the business expansion scheme has realised about £1·25 billion in new investment, some of which has gone to purchasing empty or repossessed properties for renting.

Finally, a task force on Government Departments' empty houses has been set up to agree a programme of disposals of the 26,000 empty homes identified which are not needed immediately for operational purposes and to help bring them back into housing use.

Air Quality (London)

18. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the level of monitoring of air quality in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: My Department will be issuing a consultataion document in the summer on the extension of national air quality monitoring by the further integration of local authority and central Government funded monitoring.

Meanwhile the hon. Member will be pleased to know that I am able to announce today that our enhanced urban network will be extended by the incorporation of a site in Bexley, close to his own constituency.

Black Businesses

19. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what his Department is doing to help small black businesses in the inner city.

Mr. Robin Squire: In 1993-94 the Department is providing £408 million under urban expenditure programmes, which have among their objectives to stimulate the creation of small businesses and to help existing ones thrive and grow. A proportion of those funds go to small black businesses. City challenge partnerships and inner city task forces particularly identify ethnic minorities as a target group.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Unit

21. **Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when an anouncement will be made on the future of THORP.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. and learned Friend received the regulators' report on their public consultation on their proposed draft authorisations for the Sellafield site earlier this week. We are now giving it our urgent consideration.

Revenue Support Grant

22. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Cumbria county council on the level of the most recent revenue support grant settlements.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has received a number of representations from Cumbria county council about the

level of revenue support grant in recent years. Each was given careful consideration before the Secretary of State announced his proposals for the year ahead. My Department has also received a representation from Cumbria in relation to the current review of SSAs which will be carefully considered.

Environment (County Councils)

23. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be meeting the Association of County Councils to discuss environmental issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I regularly discuss issues of common concern with the chairman of the ACC, together with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of District Councils, in the central and local government environment forum. The next meeting of the forum is being planned for July.

Standard Spending Assessments

24. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider changing the calculation method for standard spending assessments in respect of education for under five-year-olds.

Mr. Redwood: The method of calculation for standard spending assessments is currently under review in the light of new information from the 1991 census. This review includes an examination of the education elements.

31. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his Department's review of the standard spending assessments system.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about his Department's review of the standard spending assessments system.

Mr. Robin Squire: Work on our review of standard spending assessments for 1994-95 is proceeding in consultation with local authority representatives.

We have invited local authorities to send us their views on SSAs and many have already taken the opportunity so to do. We shall consider all representations carefully, including those made to us during consultation on the revenue support grant settlement for 1993-94.

Local Government Finance

25. **Mr. Bryan Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of County Councils to discuss local authority finance.

32. **Mr. Hoon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next plans to meet representatives of the Association of County Councils to discuss local authority finance.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. and learned Friend will be meeting representatives of the Association of County Councils at the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance in July and again in October. My officials and those of the assocation meet regularly to discuss a wide range of topics related to the financing of local authorities.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the latest estimate of the extra capital spending by local authorities, generated by the relaxation of the rules relating to the use of capital receipts, over the three and a half years from the Chancellor's autumn statement on 12 November:

(2) what is the total sum of local authority capital receipts since the Chancellor's autumn statement to date; what proportion has been reinvested in building and construction work; and what his latest estimate of the total capital receipts due to be raised by the end of December.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* No outturn information is yet available for the period since the autumn statement. I shall be monitoring the extent to which authorities are raising and spending receipts during the period of the relaxation of the capital receipts rules. No new estimate of extra receipts or spending has been made since that published in the autumn statement.

73. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his Department's best estimates of housing capital and other receipts likely to be received in 1993-94 and the amount of those receipts estimated to be set aside as provision for credit liabilities in each region and each class of local authority in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department is currently receiving and processing budget returns for 1993-94 from local authorities. I will arrange for the estimates to be placed in the Library of the House when this process has been completed.

75. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were *(a)* the total housing capital and other receipts received by local authorities, *(b)* the amount of those receipts set aside as provision for credit liabilities and *(c)* the total capital receipts spent by local authorities on capital projects, in each region and each class of local authority in England for 1991-92 and estimated for 1992-93.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is given in the table:

Local authority capital receipts (£ million)

	Received	*Set aside*	*[1]Spent*
1991-92			
Class			
Shire Counties	169	70	137
Metropolitan Districts	479	292	192
London Boroughs	504	320	272
Shire Districts	1,043	646	669
Other Authorities	68	27	36
Total England	2,263	1,355	1,306
Region			
South East	1,057	626	672
South West	159	91	136
East Anglia	109	72	49
West Midlands	224	138	82
East Midlands	149	84	115
North West	242	144	113
Yorkshire and Humberside	168	105	73
Northern	155	95	66
Source: Capital Outturn Returns (provisional)			
1992-93			
Class			
Shire Counties	158	41	138
Metropolitan Districts	364	133	221

	Received	Set aside	[1]Spent
London Boroughs	583	275	264
Shire Districts	924	427	597
Other Authorities	31	15	18
Total England	2,060	891	1,238
Region			
South East	1,050	471	591
South West	132	53	109
East Anglia	146	88	47
West Midlands	162	62	105
East Midlands	131	48	109
North West	184	75	114
Yorkshire and Humberside	130	46	100
Northern	125	48	63

Source:
Capital Payment Returns
[1] Use of usable capital receipts to finance capital expenditure, including use of usable receipts received in previous years.

69. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of set aside capital receipts was used to redeem credit liabilities in each region and each class of local authority in England in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities are not required separately to identify the reserved part of capital receipts from other amounts set aside as provision for credit liabilities.

The following table shows the amount of external debt repaid using PCL moneys in 1990-91 and 1991-92. Information for 1992-93 is not yet available.

PCL money used by local authorities in England to repay debt

£ million

	1990-91	1991-92
Class		
Shire counties	189	193
Metropolitan districts	333	322
London boroughs	406	533
Shire districts	771	577
Other authorities	23	20
Total England	1,722	1,645
Region		
South East	852	817
South West	137	91
East Anglia	43	61
West Midlands	241	163
East Midlands	130	93
North West	140	182
Yorkshire and Humberside	89	143
Northern	90	95

Source: Capital Outturn Returns (provisional).

34. **Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further representations he has received regarding Gloucestershire county council's budget 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Gloucestershire county council has challenged the cap proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend and suggested an alternative in support of which it has made oral and written representations. We have also received written representations from a number of school governors and Gloucestershire residents. My right hon. and learned Friend will consider all these representations very carefully before taking his decisions on the authority's final cap.

Merseyside Development Corporation

26. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the level of funding to the Merseyside development corporation in the present financial year and in the past three years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The financial allocations to the Merseyside Development Corporation for these years are shown in the table.

	£ million
1992-93	37·50
1991-92	30·05
1990-91	24·00
1989-90	23·00

Plymouth Development Corporation

27. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the current position of the Plymouth development corporation.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Plymouth development corporation came into existence on 1 April 1993. A chairman, deputy chairman and seven other board members have now been appointed. There is one remaining vacancy on the board which will be filled in due course. The chief executive's post has been advertised and an appointment is expected shortly. The proposed budget for the regeneration of the Plymouth urban development area is £45 million over an indicative lifetime of five years, of which £7 million will be available to spend in 1993-94.

The corporation recently moved into its permanent accommodation in the Royal William Yard and it held its first board meeting on 11 May.

Sewage Treatment Works

29. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in upgrading sewage treatment works which were in breach of their discharge consents at the time of privatisation of the water industry.

Mr. Maclean: The water industry's investment programme is making good progress. The latest figures available demonstrate a continuing improvement in the operational performance of sewage treatment works. In 1991 the proportion of works complying with its consent standards was 94 per cent. compared with 83 per cent. in 1988.

Homelessness

30. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new initiatives he plans to take to tackle the problem of homelessness.

Sir George Young: The number of households accepted as homeless by local authorities during the last quarter of 1992 was the lowest for two years. We have launched a number of initiatives designed to reduce homelessness and

our spending plans will enable housing associations to provide 170,000 new social homes over the three years from 1992-93.

TUPE Regulations

33. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has held with local authorities on the implications for local government of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 and the acquired rights directive.

Mr. Redwood: No specific discussions have been held on this subject, but it is occasionally raised with Ministers by local authorities and their representatives.

Redbridge (Employees)

35. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were directly employed by the London borough of Redbridge in 1981 and at the latest available date.

Mr. Redwood: The London borough of Redbridge employed 8,446 people in December 1981 and 8,883 people in December 1992.

Local Government Reform

36. **Mr. Mandelson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has held since 6 May with representatives of the Association of County Councils about the reform of local government.

Mr. Robin Squire: None.

Victoria Street Premises

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *121*, when he expects the building contract in respect of works at No. 1 Victoria street to commence; and what is the total cost incurred to date by his Department in respect of these premises since September 1991.

Mr. Baldry: Negotiations with the landlord of this building are expected to be concluded shortly, which should enable the building contract to commence in autumn 1993. Costs incurred to date are approximately £3·4 million.

Local Authority House Building

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for local authority house building.

Mr. Baldry: It is provisionally estimated that local authorities in England completed 300 new dwellings during the three months January to March 1993 and completed 3,000 dwellings during 1992.

Housing associations are now the main providers of new social housing. As I said in my answer of 19 May to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), *Official Report*, column *183*, the Housing Corporation now estimates that public funds have enabled housing associations to make an extra 66,000 extra homes available to new tenants last year.

Travellers

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish for consultation his new draft guidance to local planning authorities on sites for gipsies and those of a nomadic way of life.

Mr. Baldry: My Department and the Welsh Office have today issued for consultation a draft circular containing proposed guidance to local planning authorities on the planning aspects of gipsy sites. This forms part of a range of measures designed to reduce illegal camping, including our recently announced proposals to reform the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

The purpose of the revised guidance is to ensure that gipsies are put on the same footing as other developers under the planning system and that the system recognises gipsies' particular accommodation needs.

Our objective is that gipsies should be given every encouragement to find, develop and run sites for themselves, as I know so many of them are anxious to do.

Local Authority Expenditure

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of local authority expenditure was funded by central government in each year since 1974.

Mr. Robin Squire: The available information is as follows:

Proportion of LA revenue expenditure met by government grants, non-domestic rates, domestic rates, community charges and council taxes

	Government grants[1] as percentage of local authority expenditure	*Non-domestic rates[2] as percentage of local authority expenditure*	*Domestic rates/ community charges[3] as percentage of local authority expenditure*
1981-82	56	25	20
1982-83	53	26	21
1983-84	54	26	19
1984-85	54	26	20
1985-86	54	28	21
1986-87	50	28	22
1987-88	49	28	23
1988-89	46	28	25
1989-90	44	29	26
1990-91	42	29	28
1991-92	52	31	16
1992-93	54	29	17
1993-94	56	27	16

[1] For the years 1981-82 to 1989-90 Government Grants comprise Aggregate Exchequer Grant and Rate Rebate Grants. For 1990-91 to 1992-93 Government Grants are made up of Revenue Support Grant, Special Grants, Specific Grants in Aggregate External Finance, Community Charge Grant (1991-92), Teachers Pay Grant (1992-93), Community Charge Benefits and Transitional Relief/Community Charge Reduction Scheme Grants. For 1993-94 Government Grants are made up of Revenue Support Grant, Specific and Special Grants in Aggregate External Finance, Council Tax Benefit and Council Tax Transitional Reduction Scheme Grant.

[2] For the years 1981-82 to 1989-90, this represents non-domestic rate yields net of rate relief. For the years 1990-91 to 1993-94, this represents the distributable amount from the non-domestic rates pool.

[3] Net of rate rebates for the years 1981-82 to 1989-90. Net of Community Charge Benefits and Transitional Relief/Community Charge Reduction Scheme in 1990-91 to 1992-93. Net of Council Tax

Benefit and Council Tax Transitional Relief Scheme in 1993-94.
⁴ The percentages do not add to 100 per cent. The difference is funding from balances and other adjustments.

Energy Management Assistance Scheme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the anticipated gross financial savings which would accrue via his energy management assistance scheme as a consequence of achieving the scheme's target saving for carbon by the year 2000.

Mr. Maclean: If energy management assistance scheme spend carries on to the the year 2000 as presently planned, the total gross financial savings in energy costs covering that period would amount to approximately £250 million.

Geographical Information Systems

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to make environmental data stored on geographical information systems in his Department compatible with *(a)* geographical information systems data stored by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, *(b)* GIS data stored by the United Nations environment programme and *(c)* geographical information systems data stored by the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Howard: The Department is currently developing a geographical information strategy. This will cover the standards required for exchanging data with its associated agencies and other bodies, and will take into account the standards required for exchanging data with UNEP and other international organisations. HMIP does not yet have a corporate GIS and will be involved in the development of the Department's strategy. The National Rivers Authority has recently completed a feasibility study into geographical information systems and are now developing a more detailed specification including the necessary standards to facilitate data interchange.

Shared Ownership Programme

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to extend the Housing Corporation do-it-yourself shared ownership programme to first time buyers and to exchange buyers suffering from negative equity.

Mr. Baldry: The Housing Corporation's do-it-yourself shared ownership programme is already available to first-time buyers. Sixty per cent. of the programme is reserved for tenants of housing associations or local authorities, which will release rented homes for those in housing need.

The Government have no plans to extend the scheme to existing owner-occupiers. To help people with negative equity who wish to move, the limit on building society's unsecured loans has been raised from £10,000 to £25,000 per person, and the security of one property can now be exchanged for security of another against the original loan without losing mortgage interest relief.

Easington (Enterprise Zone)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce enterprise zone status in Easington; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Squire: The statutory procedures leading to the designation of an enterprise zone normally take at least six months. I expect to designate an enterprise zone in the vicinity of Easington at the earliest opportunity. I shall make a statement at that time.

Audit Commission

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the financial management review of the Audit Commission to be published.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* I am considering the arrangements for publishing the report of this review.

Inner City Wards, Manchester

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those wards of the city of Manchester which are categorised as inner city wards.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* Manchester's inner city wards, for urban programme purposes, are as follows:

Ardwick
Beswick and Clayton
Bradford
Central
Cheetham
Gorton North
Gorton South
Harpurhey
Hulme
Levenshulme
Lightbourne
Longsight
Moss Side
Newton Heath
Busholme

Housing Refurbishment

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide new moneys for the refurbishment of old decaying houses in the public and private sectors.

Mr. Baldry: Bringing empty properties back into use is one of the Government's key objectives, and my Department has established a number of initiatives to tackle problems of disrepair and underuse:

14 per cent. of new allocations this year from the Housing Corporation's rented programme were for rehabilitation and a further 5 per cent. for short-life housing ('mini-HAT"). The Department is currently undertaking research into the role played by housing association rehabilitation.

£346 million has been allocated in 1993-94 to support local authority expenditure on private house renewal, including house renovation grants. Taken together with local authorities' own contribution of 25 per cent. this provision will finance a higher total expenditure on grants (£575 million) than in 1992-93.

In addition to other local authority capital expenditure on housing, the Government make considerable resources available through the estate action programme for the refurbishment of decaying houses in the public sector through regeneration schemes on run-down local authority estates. Since the programme was launched in 1985, over £1 billion has been allocated or earmarked for over 1,000 schemes. The programe's budget has increased from £268 million in 1991-92 to £347 million in 1992-93 and £356 million this year.

Since its establishment in 1991 the Housing Action Trust at North Hull has already spent some £25 million towards renovating houses in its designated area. Much remains to be

done and a similar amount will be spent in Hull in this year alone. Two other HATs have been established at Waltham Forest and Liverpool, and tenants at Castle Vale and Tower Hamlets have recently voted for the establishment of HATs for their estates. Apart from North Hull, HATs are concerned mainly with the redevelopment or refurbishment of decaying high and low rise blocks of flats. The planned expenditure for HATs in this year is £86·8 million.

Under the Department's flats over shops initiative £25 million in grants towards renovation and conversion costs is being made available through local authorities between 1992-93 and 1994-95 to bring empty space above commercial properties back into residential use. The scheme is designed to be a three-way partnership between local authorities, housing associations, and private property owners.

The Government have set up a task force to oversee an agreed programme of disposals of empty homes owned by Government Departments which are no longer needed for operational use, and help bring these properties back into use for people in housing need.

The Department has launched a scheme to allow housing associations to act as intermediaries between private landlords and tenants, and is funding its administration costs. This scheme, Housing Associations as Managing Agents (HAMA), is designed to encourage people to let out property which would otherwise be empty by removing the stresses usually attached to being a landlord. Following the success of five pilot schemes during 1992-93, the Government have decided to expand the scheme throughout England.

The Government will continue to support and encourage the refurbishment of empty and decaying houses in the public and private sectors, and to welcome constructive suggestions on the balance of its expenditure programmes.

Deregulation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to make available in the Library the list of powers and organisations relating to environmental protection which will be candidates for deregulation.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the anwer my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities gave to the hon. Member for Harwich (Mr. Sproat) on 20 April, *Official Report*, column *131*.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in environmental protection over the last year.

Mr. Maclean: In the past year we have taken action on the environment at all levels: local, national and international. The United Kingdom played a leading role in the Earth summit, and we are taking an active part in the international discussions to follow up the agreements reached there. The EC Environment Council made significant progress under our presidency on environmental issues, in particular in integrating environmental concerns into the development of the different sectoral policies. We set out our achievements and targets in domestic policies in the second year anniversary report on the Environment White Paper, published in October 1992.

Ventilation and Insulation

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to amend part F of the Building Regulations in respect of the ventilation and insulation of buildings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I am today issuing a consultation paper setting out our proposals for improving the requirements of part F of the Building Regulations 1991 (Means of Ventilation). Copies have been placed in the Library. The proposals have been introduced to improve and simplify the current provisions in dwellings; and to provide builders with a wider range of options on how these can be achieved. Requirements for non-domestic buildings are proposed which generally reflect the relevant requirements of the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992 so that new building work should not require subsequent adaptation.

EC Funding, Merseyside

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the date of the last meeting of the Merseyside support and framework committee for European Community funding; on what dates the committee met during 1992; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* During 1992, the directing committee for the Merseyside integrated development operation programme met on 7 July and 1 October. There were no meetings of the committee in 1993.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the names of the members of the Merseyside support and framework committee for European Community funding; and what are the names of the organisations represented on that committee by each member.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* The directing committee for the Merseyside integrated development operation programme is composed of representatives from local authorities, Government Departments, statutory agencies and other organisations which benefit from European Community funding. Arrangements for future years are currently under review.

ReChem Incineration Plant

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have received regarding complaints made to the European Commission on the prospective breach of EC directive 85/337/EEC by plans by ReChem to extend its toxic waste incineration plant at Pontypool.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have been asked to reply.

I have received one representation from the hon. Gentleman.

EMPLOYMENT

Manpower Services Commission

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans she has to amend the 1984 Manpower Services Commission code of practice; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the employment service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 26 May 1993:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to write to you direct to respond to your Parliamentary Question to her about what plans she has to amend the 1984 Manpower Services Commission Code of Good Practice. This is something which falls within the responsibilities she has delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Code of Good Practice has been well received by employers since it was first introduced, and is still requested in large numbers. At this stage there are no plans to develop a new Code, but my Agency would, of course, consult widely should we decide to do so.

You may wish to know that we have recently reprinted the Code as part of a wider exercise to update Employment Service disability service literature. There have been no changes of substance to the advice and recommendations made in the Code but we have taken the opportunity to introduce descriptions of the new restructured services provided by the Employment Service to disabled people and employers. We have also included the new disability symbol which has the words "Positive about Disabled People". Some addresses have been corrected and some slight adjustments made to the text used where it had become outdated.

I enclose a copy of the reprinted Code which I hope you will find useful.

As decided by the Administrative Committee of the House of Commons, Chief Executive replies to written Parliamentary Questions will now be published in the Official Report. I will also place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Health and Safety

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to her answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *41*, how the review of health and safety at work regulations will be conducted; which organisations will be invited to take part; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have asked the Health and Safety Commission to report, by the end of April 1994, on the impact on business of the existing health and safety regulatory arrangements and especially on the scope for further repeals or simplification of legislation which would not endanger acceptable standards of protection.

I am informed that the Commission is establishing seven business-led advisory groups to help it in this task, which groups will include members representing employer and worker interests and specific representation from the small firms sector. Through these groups and by other means such as case studies, and written consultation exercises, the review will draw on a wide range of experience and expertise from industry and elsewhere.

I understand that the Commission plans shortly to issue an open invitation for interested organisations and individuals to submit evidence to the review.

Unemployed Disabled People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of unemployment among disabled workers was recorded in the most recently available quarter by the labour force survey; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The labour force survey asks people of working age if they currently have any health problems or disability which limits the kind of paid work they can do. Estimates based on answers to this question will include people with short-term health problems and disabilities as well as those registered as disabled. LFS estimates for autumn 1992 show that in Great Britain the unemployment rate, based on the ILO definition of unemployment for people with all such health problems or disabilities was 21 per cent.—not seasonally adjusted.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged (i) 40 to 44 years, (ii) aged 45 to 49 years, (iii) aged 50 to 54 years, (iv) aged 55 to 59 years and (v) aged 60 to 64 years who found employment within the last year for which figures are available had been unemployed for (1) under six months, (2) between six and 12 months, (3) between 12 and 24 months and (4) over 24 months.

Mr. McLoughlin: Quarterly analyses of claimant unemployed men and women by pre-specified age and duration of unemployment bands are available from the NOMIS database in the Library. The information relates to those whose spell of unemployment is ongoing. For computerised claims NOMIS also gives age and duration information on those leaving the claimant count each month. Information is not held on the labour market status of those who leave claimant unemployment. However, sample surveys suggest that the majority go into employment.

Social Fund Training Courses

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were on an European social fund training course in the Greater London area at the latest available date.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Comprehensive details of the breakdown of European social fund participants are not available for the Greater London area and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Offshore Health and Safety

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many *(a)* improvement notices, *(b)* prohibition notices and *(c)* prosecutions have been issued or commenced by the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division (i) from 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992 and (ii) since 1 April 1992; and what were the results and penalties in each case of a completed prosecution.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[pursuant to his reply, 12 February 1993, c. 818]:* I regret that the statistics provided were incomplete. This was due to information from only one of the two Aberdeen operations units being included. The correct answer should read as follows.

	1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	*Since 1 April 1992*
Number of improvement notices served	Nil	17
Number of prohibition notices served	2	5

Information on completed prosecutions is as follows:

(i) between 1 April 1991 and 31 March 1992, a total of 3 companies were convicted and fines of £850, £20,000 and £5,000 respectively were imposed.

(ii) Since 1 April 1992, a total of 6 companies have been convicted and fines of £100,000, £1,000, £30,000, £1,000, £1,000 and £5,000 respectively were imposed. Charges brought against two companies were not proved.

DEFENCE

Hydrographic Office

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for 1993-94 for the Hydrographic Office defence support agency.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Chief of Fleet Support, acting as the owner of the agency on behalf of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence under the terms of the agency's framework document, has set the following key targets for this financial year.

On quality of service, the chief executive is required to continue to ensure that all urgent dangers to navigation are promulgated by radio navigational warnings within 20 hours of receipt of the information. He is also required to improve the state of revision of Admiralty navigational charts and publications in waters of United Kingdom national responsibility so that at 1 April 1994, 80 per cent. will have been revised or reviewed and found to need no revision, within the previous 10 years. The chief executive is also required to achieve his endorsed and funded programme of work as set by the Ministry of Defence Hydrographic Board.

In respect of financial targets, the chief executive is to seek to minimise the level of Exchequer support by achieving 72 per cent. cost recovery.

Defence Postal and Courier Service

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Postal and Courier Service defence support agency for 1993-94.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The chief executive of the Defence Postal and Courier Service defence support agency has been set the following targets for 1993-94:

1. Improve the percentage of air mail and Ministry of Defence van service items that meet quality of service standards by 0·5 per cent. and 2 per cent. respectively.
2. Introduce an automated financial management and information system by 31 March 1994 to produce all necessary information to support measures of output and unit costs and to meet the accounting requirements of Defence Agencies.
3. Increase the Agency's efficiency by making a 1 per cent. saving against 1992-93 outturn net operating costs (either by imput or output means).
4. Implement phase 1 of the Agency's market testing plan and examine the potential for areas for further study.

Minesweepers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many minesweepers are in service with the Royal Navy; how many other vessels can be called on for minesweeping duties in the event of an emergency; and from what sources.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 30 mine countermeasure vessels in service with the Royal Navy, including nine minesweepers. We do not envisage circumstances in which the Royal Navy could not meet the United Kingdom's requirements for minesweeping from within its own resources.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to the United Kingdom of monitoring the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 23 April 1993, *Official Report*, column *242*.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was *(a)* the required operational sortie height and *(b)* the actual recorded height of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton with Frickley, South Yorkshire at approximately 15:12 hrs on 19 May;

(2) what was the required operational sortie height and the actual recorded height of the military jet aircraft that overflew the village of Clayton with Frickley, South Yorkshire, at approximately 11:04 hrs on 19 May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of aircraft were authorised to fly in the low flying area at about the times stated on 19 May, but we have no reason to believe any of those flew below 1,000 ft around the village of Clayton with Frickley.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the boundaries of the military low-flying transit area that covers the towns of Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield were last changed; and on what date a radar surveillance was last carried out to ensure that no military jet aircraft infringed the operational low-flying height requirements in that area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No changes have been made to the boundaries of the military low flying transit area that covers the towns of Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield since the United Kingdom low-flying system was introduced in 1979. There has been no radar surveillance of low flying in the transit area.

Lance Corporal Gary Fryer

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *264*, if he will provide a copy of the police report and inquest reports on the death of Lance Corporal Gary Fryer No. 24792566 to his parents once they become available.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes, if Lance Corporal Fryer's parents make such a request.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers are part of the British Army of the Rhine; and what was the total cost in the last financial year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The military strength of the British Army of the Rhine is currently about 39,000 and the total operating cost of BAOR in financial year 1992-93 was approximately £1,440 million.

Service Families

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now publish the Gaffney report on service families.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no plans to publish the Gaffney report which was an internal Army document prepared in 1986-87; much of the data it contained will in any case now be out of date.

British Troops (UN Peacekeeping Forces)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the figures for the total number of British troops *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured while on duty for the United Nations peacekeeping forces since the end of the Gulf war; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of four United Kingdom service men have died while serving with the United Nations since the end of the Gulf conflict. A further seven have suffered serious or very serious injury over the same period. These figures include death or injury from all sources, not just those resulting from hostile action. Only one death was caused by hostile action.

British Troops (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total number of British troops *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured while on duty in Northern Ireland during 1991-92 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The total number of British troops killed as a result of terrorist action whilst on duty in Northern Ireland was as follows:

	Number
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	8
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	5

Information about the number of British troops injured is not available in the form requested. The total number of troops injured in Northern Ireland as a result of terrorist action, both on and off duty, was as follows:

	Number
1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992	282
1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993	267

Submarines

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number and class of submarines in service in the Royal Navy on 10 May.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy's submarine fleet on 10 May consisted of three Polaris, one Valiant, five Swiftsure, seven Trafalgar, three Oberon and three Upholder Class submarines giving a total of 22 boats.

Landing Platform Helicopter Vessel

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, during the bid for the contract to build the landing platform helicopter vessel, personnel from Kvaerner Govan participated in the bid clarification process.

Mr. Aitken: No. Kvaerner Govan is a sub-contractor to VSEL.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the course of consideration of the landing platform helicopter vessel, the VSEL bid has been comprehensively costed.

Mr. Aitken: The commercial aspects of both bids were assessed against our normal criteria for competitive contracts.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, during consideration of the tender for the landing platform helicopter vessel, there was a thorough evaluation of the best and final tenders from VSEL/Kvaerner Govan and Swan Hunter before a report was made to the Controller of the Royal Navy; and how much time was taken on this evaluation before the first report was made on the outcome of the tendering process.

Mr. Aitken: A thorough evaluation was conducted over the period November 1992 to March 1993 culminating in an examination of the best and final offers which were received from the two companies on 22 April. The evaluation was completed in time for me to make the announcement on 11 May.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance was given to both Swan Hunter and VSEL/Kvaerner Govan during clarification, prior to the best and final offer round, on reduced standards which would be acceptable in the bid for the contract to build the landing platform helicopter vessel.

Mr. Aitken: Both tenderers were given the same advice on standards during the clarification process and the best and final offer response had to be fully compliant with these standards.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in considering the tender for the landing platform helicopter vessel, what checks were carried out on the ability of Kvaerner Govan to produce subsystems and the final ship to naval engineering standards.

Mr. Aitken: My officials visited Kvaerner Govan to verify that it was capable of producing subsystems and a ship to the required standards.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in considering the tender for the landing platform helicopter vessel, what checks his Department has carried out concerning the bid submitted by Kvaerner Govan to VSEL and the specification placed on Kvaerner Govan by VSEL.

Mr. Aitken: My Department's contract is with VSEL and requires it to ensure that the work meets the required specifications.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the bids for the landing platform helicopter vessel tendered by both Swan Hunter and VSEL/Kvaerner Govan included comprehensive drawings and other elements required of a technical data package.

Mr. Aitken: Both tenderers provided the required technical disclosure.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what options from the first round bid for the

landing platform helicopter vessel were taken up from both VSEL/Kvaerner Govan and Swan Hunter in the best and final offer round.

Mr. Aitken: Costed options for certain equipments and facilities were taken up. The bids were compared on an equal basis.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there was a significant price gap between the first bids submitted for the landing platform helicopter vessel last autumn from Swan Hunter and VSEL.

Mr. Aitken: Yes. Details of the bids are commercially confidential, but will be provided to the National Audit Office.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if, during consideration of the tender for the landing platform helicopter vessel, all elements of the tenders from VSEL/Kvaerner Govan and Swan Hunter were assessed for compliance with Ministry of Defence requirements; and if either bidder submitted a global undertaking of compliance;

(2) if the tenders from both VSEL/Kvaerner Govan and Swan Hunter for the landing platform helicopter vessel specifically state that pipework, machinery and electrical systems will be completed to the applicable naval engineering standards.

Mr. Aitken: Both bids were assessed for compliance and our contract with VSEL fully meets our requirements.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further documentation is required from VSEL before a contract to build the landing platform helicopter vessel can be signed; and when his Department expects the contract to be signed.

Mr. Aitken: The contract was placed on 11 May 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the tenders from both VSEL/Kvaerner and Swan Hunter for the landing platform helicopter vessel included all the changes required by his Department as a result of the first bidding round; and if each tender included the additional requirements specified by his Department during the best and final offer.

Mr. Aitken: Both tenders offered a ship to meet the same requirements.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the anticipated costs of Royal Navy overseeing teams which will have to be located at Kvaerner Govan to ensure compliance during the building of the landing platform helicopter vessel.

Mr. Aitken: Resident naval overseers will be employed on this task, augmented as necessary. There will be no net increase in cost.

VSEL (Submarine Contracts)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current level of advance payments from his Department to VSEL for submarine contracts.

Mr. Aitken: Payments to VSEL under submarine contracts are made in arrears on the achievement of agreed milestones.

Royal Navy (Engineering)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what comparative assessment he has made of the lengths and cost of practical applications training of engineer officers for the Royal Navy if the engineering academic studies are concentrated on a civilian university.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I announced proposals on 25 May about the future of royal naval engineer officer training. These proposals are now the subject of consultation. Practical application training course lengths and the costs involved in running them will not be affected by these proposals although there will be a relocation cost which has been taken into account.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the advantages of educating and training engineer officer undergraduates for the Royal Navy in an establishment located close to a major naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As was set out in the consultation document that I placed yesterday in the Library of the House, the education and training of royal naval engineer officer undergraduates is presently undertaken by a variety of methods, in-service and by universities. There is little interaction between engineer officers reading for degrees or undertaking application training courses, and a major naval base. Ready access to the sea is, of course, an important factor in their training as naval officers.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of engineer officers in the Royal Navy do not possess an engineering degree.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Approximately 30 per cent. of engineer officers do not possess an engineering degree.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times he has visited the Royal Naval Engineering college, Manadon, Plymouth, in the past 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. I last visited the Royal Naval Engineering college at Manadon on 14 November 1991.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made regarding the costs and feasibility of transferring engineering training equipment and installations from the Royal Naval Engineering college, Manadon, Plymouth, to other establishments in the event of a decision to close the college at Manadon.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The proposals that I announced on 25 May were based on studies which inter alia assessed the practicalities of transferring equipment from Royal Naval Engineering college, Manadon in the event of a decision to relocate application training. Estimated costs involved would be approximately £9,000,000 and this includes costs relating to the additional building requirements at the receiving establishments.

Royal Navy (BA Degrees)

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the benefits of having an in-service Bachelor of Arts degree specifically tailored for the Royal Navy's needs

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Bachelor of Arts degree in maritime defence, management and technology was introduced in 1990 to make better use of the Royal Navy's degree training facilities at the Royal Naval Engineering college, Manadon and the Royal Naval college, Greenwich. The course allows for suitably qualified officers who do not undertake degree study at civilian university to develop their educational, intellectual and personnel potential in vocationally relevant fields.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what has been the cost of running the Royal Navy's in-service BA degree for each of the last three years;

(2) what has been the cost of setting up the Royal Navy's BA degree in maritime defence technology.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy's BA degree in maritime defence, management and technology is conducted at Royal Naval Engineering college, Manadon with support from Britannia Royal Naval college, Dartmouth and Royal Naval college, Greenwich. The costs involved are minimal and are not readily identifiable separately.

EH101 Helicopters

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimate of the total number of EH101 Merlin anti-submarine warfare helicopters required to provide each of the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers with sufficient aircraft; and what plans he has to order a second batch of EH101s.

Mr. Aitken: It is not our policy to discuss numbers of aircraft deployed on individual ships. The 44 Merlin EH101 anti-submarine warfare helicopters ordered in 1991 will enable us to set up training squadrons and introduce the first squadrons of aircraft into service with type 23 frigates and one carrier. No decision has yet been taken on the size or timing of a second order.

Royal Military College of Science

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times he has visited the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, in the past 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the past 12 months, I have visited the college twice.

Mines in the Next Century Project

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the mines in the next century project and United Kingdom participation in it.

Mr. Aitken: Mines in the next century—MINX—is the name given to the project to study the replacement for the United Kingdom's existing anti-tank mine from the year 2001. We are currently considering the options for this.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the efficiency of the contingency plan for the introduction of disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. David Hinchliffe, dated 25 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the efficiency of the contingency plan for the introduction of Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Firstly, I should explain that DLA was launched in February 1992 with an extensive publicity campaign. As part of this campaign we wrote to all existing Mobility Allowance (MobA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) recipients (approximately 1 million customers). Changes in the benefit were explained and an invitation extended, where appropriate, for them to claim extra money under the new DLA rules. In the meantime other external take-up campaigns were also being run.

It had been expected that the initial launch of the new benefit would generate large numbers of claims in the months surrounding its introduction. Whilst planning had taken place for an increase in benefit claims, the success of the advertising campaign and the various take-up campaigns resulted in a much larger number of claims being attracted in the early stages than had been expected. There was also a huge increase in the number of claims to AA during the same period.

This sudden surge of claims occurred as staff were adjusting to the new benefit processes and procedures. It meant that a backlog of cases built up in the weeks following the introduction of DLA.

A recovery plan was quickly instigated. This consisted of several facets and included:

The setting up of a seniour management task force.

An increase in the number of staff, devoted to handling claims, by over 800. This represented an increase of approximately 25 per cent.

The use of overtime which equated to a further 300 staff.

The establishment and equipping of four remote processing units to increase output.

The conducting of a detailed review of procedures and organisation to speed up the process wherever possible.

As a result of these measures the throughput of claims was increased. The first phase of the recovery programme was successfully completed by the end of October 1992. The number of outstanding DLA and top-up claims had been considerably reduced from a peak of nearly 250,000 at the end of June to less than 115,000 by the end of October. During the same period outstanding AA claims had also been reduced significantly from over 150,000 to just over 52,000.

Further reductions in the number of claims on hand have been made and at the end of April 1993 the number of outstanding DLA (including top-ups) and AA new claims was 35,000 and 34,000 respectively. This represents less than four weeks intake of work i.e. less than the target clearance time for both benefits.

The majority of DLA new claims received since January 1993 have been cleared within their primary target. For the month of April 1993, 75 per cent. of DLA new claims were cleared within 30 days against the Secretary of State (SoS) primary target (65 per cent. in 30 days) and 91 per cent. were cleared in 55 days against the SoS secondary target (85 per cent. in 55 days).

The results outlined clearly illustrate the overall effectiveness of the measures undertaken. The Benefits Agency will continue to strive to produce a thoroughly efficient service for all customers of DLA and associated benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Pensions (Post Office)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many senior citizens used the Post Office to receive their pensions each year since 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: The payment of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 25 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to the points raised in your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many senior citizens used the Post Office to receive their pensions each year since 1990.

Pensioners receiving their pensions through the Post Office are paid by order book. The number of Retirement Pension customers paid by order book for each year are as follows:

	Number
February 1990	7,720,000
May 1991	7,750,000
April 1992	7,710,000
May 1993	7,570,000

Figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Income Support

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many senior citizens receive income support in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the north-west and *(c)* Great Britain.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 25 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking how many senior citizens receive Income Support in (a) Lancashire, (b) the North West and (c) Great Britain.

The information is not available in the form you have requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. This is because statistics that reflect the number of senior citizens (that is, those who have reached retirement age) in receipt of Income Support, either nationally or by region are not routinely collected.

However, I am able to tell you that there are 1,570,805 Income Support pensioners in Great Britain as a whole. An Income Support pensioner is defined as a customer aged 60 or over. The source of this information is the Income Support Mangagement Information Statistics.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what were the target and the achieved accuracy rates for each social security benefit for each of the last five years;

(2) how many people made a claim for each social security benefit for each of the last five years.

Mr. Burt: The administration of social security benefits is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Frank Field, dated 26 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking for details of the target and achieved accuracy rates for each social security benefit for each of the last five years; and how many people made a claim for each social security benefit for each of the last five years.

I have attached a list of targets and achievement at Annex A. At Annex B I attach a list of benefits and the number of claims made. I should point out that a number of these claims will have been made by the same person.

I hope you will find this information helpful. A copy will appear in the Official Report and a copy will also appear in the Library.

Numbers of claims to social security benefits

Benefit	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Income Support	2,716,364	4,196,654	4,089,336	4,428,866	4,437,816
SF Crisis Loans[5]	496,360	664,812	596,030	711,452	837,043
SF Community Care Grants[5]	312,151	524,284	629,316	1,028,640	1,183,945
SF Budget Loans[5]	926,308	1,132,448	1,092,395	1,360,145	1,497,002
SF Maternity Payment[5]	[1]—	[1]—	234,158	262,345	271,598
SF Funeral Payment[5]	[1]—	[1]—	68,372	77,735	83,386
Sickness/Invalidity Benefit	722,321	1,045,442	1,053,667	1,118,284	1,085,631
Maternity Benefit	122,673	117,752	98,828	106,736	97,378
Severe Disablement Allowance	35,636	56,454	57,339	64,513	59,185
Retirement Pension	592,850	770,567	735,490	749,513	657,401
Widows Payment	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	56,032
Widows Benefit	41,784	58,769	56,612	56,598	44,344
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	82,516	109,886	96,214	95,592	101,341
Family Credit	[3]434,138	1,016,786	968,587	999,060	1,154,478
War Pensions	29,216	34,699	46,033	80,430	137,567
Invalid Care Allowance	52,653	53,689	63,021	75,266	91,265
Attendance Allowance	326,734	378,119	391,205	512,835	[4]—
Attendance Allowance 65+[2]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	449,510
Mobility Allowance	226,419	243,851	236,808	268,689	[4]—

Benefit	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Disability Living Allowance[2]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	196,366	457,865
Disability Working Allowance[2]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	4,153	28,385
Legal Aid	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	344,848	371,515
Child Benefit	856,361	825,095	815,714	821,023	813,077
One Parent Benefit	166,697	182,796	190,451	178,972	193,600
Guardians Allowance	26,746	25,300	20,944	21,752	22,826
Overseas Branch Long Term Benefits	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	79,120	73,031
Overseas Branch Short Term Benefits	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	3,066	2,766

[1] No figures available.
[2] New benefit from April 1992.
[3] Figures available only from August 1988 to March 1989.
[4] Benefit ceased.
[5] Relates to the number of applications made rather than the number of actual applicants.

Benefits agency accuracy targets and achievement 1988-89 to 1992-93

Benefit area	Target 1988-89 Per cent.	Year end achievement	Target 1989-90 Per cent.	Year end achievement	Target 1990-91 Per cent.	Year end achievement	Target 1991-92 Per cent.	Year end achievement	Target 1992-93 Per cent.	Year end achievement
Income support accuracy	90·0	90·3	91·0	92·1	92·0	93·7	93·0	95·7	94·0	94·4
Short term benefits accuracy[1]	96·0	96·0	96·3	96·2	96·5	96·2	96·5	96·5	96·5	96·5
Family credit accuracy	96·0	91·4	93·0	91·6	93·0	92·2	93·0	91·5	94·0	88·9
War pensions disablement claims accuracy	97·3	95·3	96·8	93·1	95·0	94·1	95·0	94·5	95·0	97·7
War widows claims accuracy	98·5	94·4	98·5	88·9	98·5	97·5	98·5	97·4	98·5	97·6
DLA accuracy[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	96·0	92·0
DWA accuracy[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	95·0	100·0
Legal aid accuracy	92·0	92·6	92·0	93·5	94·0	95·9	94·0	94·8	94·0	94·6
Operational targets—ie set by the relevant Benefits Directorate; not the BA Management Team or Secretary of State.										
Attendance allowance	99·0	99·3	99·0	99·5	99·0	98·2	99·0	94·7	[3]—	[3]—
Mobility allowance accuracy	98·5	97·4	98·5	98·0	98·5	97·6	98·5	98·7	[3]—	[3]—
Invalid care allowance accuracy	93·0	96·5	96·0	96·9	96·0	96·5	96·0	97·2	96·0	99·1
Child benefit claims accuracy (s/forward)	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0	98·0	98·0
Child benefit claims accuracy (non s/forward)	97·0	97·2	97·5	98·1	97·5	97·9	97·5	98·5	[4]—	[4]—
One parent benefit accuracy	96·0	96·0	96·0	97·0	96·0	97·0	96·0	98·5	96·0	96·5
Change of circs accuracy	96·5	97·1	96·5	96·6	96·5	97·1	96·5	99·5	96·5	98·0
Guardians allowance accuracy	98·0	99·6	98·0	100·0	98·0	100·0	98·0	100·0	98·0	100·0
Claims reserved to CPB accuracy	97·0	97·8	97·0	98·6	97·5	99·0	97·5	98·2	97·5	99·4
Change of circs accuracy (OBs)	98·0	98·4	98·0	98·9	98·0	99·5	98·0	96·9	[4]—	[4]—
Change of circs accuracy (periodic payments)	96·5	98·2	96·5	98·5	96·5	84·1	96·5	100·0	96·5	98·7
LPG claims accuracy	98·0	91·6	98·0	99·0	98·0	99·2	98·0	97·9	98·0	98·5
Agency benefit accuracy / Health benefit unit accuracy	92·5	91·5	92·5	93·3	92·5	95·8	—	—	—	—
OVB Long term benefits accuracy	97·4	97·2	97·0	98·4	97·0	99·1	92·5	94·1	93·5	97·6
OVB Short term benefits	98·0	91·9	98·0	99·7	98·0	97·5	97·0	96·2	97·0	98·8
OVB medical benefits	—	—	99·0	100·0	99·0	98·6	98·0	100·0	98·0	99·6
							98·0	100·0	98·0	99·8

[1] Includes Sickness Benefit, Invalidity Benefit, SDA and Maternity Allowance.
[2] Benefit ceased from April 1992.
[3] New benefit from April 1992.
[4] Child Benefit straight forward and non straight forward claims accuracy and Central Pensions Branch change of circs (OBs) and (periodic payments) accuracy combined from April 1992

Income Maintenance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has of the overall cost of provisions for income maintenance in Wales; and what are the total amounts of expenditure, or revenue forgone, on *(a)* benefits, *(b)* administering benefits, *(c)* student grants, *(d)* statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay, *(e)* income tax allowances, *(f)* income tax reliefs and *(g)* the total value of contracted-out rebates and two per cent. incentives in respect of personal pensions and contracted-out schemes.

Mr. Burt: It is not possible to provide a reply in the precise form requested as some of the income maintenance information is not collected or maintained separately for Wales. The latest information available is as follows.

(i) Expenditure on Income Support in Wales in 1989-90 was £442 million.[1]

(ii) Expenditure on Housing Benefit in Wales in 1992-93 was £380 million.[2]

(iii) Estimated cost of administration of all social security benefits in Wales for 1992-93 is £55·3 million.

(iv) Estimated cost of income tax allowances on personal taxation in Wales for 1990-91 is £6,250 million.

(v) Estimated cost of tax relief on earnings and investments (excluding MIRAS) in Wales for 1990-91 is £485 million.

(vi) Expenditure on mandatory and discretionary student grants awarded by local authorities in Wales to students normally resident in their area in 1990-91 was £109 million.

Additional statistical information for Wales can be found in 'Welsh Economic Trends, No. 13', published by the Welsh Office in 1992, a copy of which is in the Library.

Note:

[1] Figures underlying Table of the Departmental Report (Cm. 2213).

[2] Table 8.7 of CSO Regional Trends 27 (1992).

Children in Hospital

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all additional benefits which are potentially available to allow parents *(a)* entitled and *(b)* not entitled to income support to visit children who are detained in hospital (i) in the short term and (ii) in the long term; if he will describe the eligibility criteria for each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Those entitled to income support may be able to receive a community care grant or a budgeting loan from the social fund for expenses to visit someone who is in hospital. Payments are discretionary but are normally given high priority. Those not in receipt of income support will normally be better placed to meet these costs because they will have higher levels of income. Even so, a crisis loan from the social fund may be payable if the payment is the only way to prevent serious damage or risk to the health or safety of the applicant. Payments from the social fund can be made in one lump sum or at regular intervals if the visits are to continue for some time.

Pension Payments

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what percentages of respondents opted for automated credit transfer and post office order book payment in each group of 8,000 recipients applying for pension payments involved in the test marketing of forms which took place in March of this year;

(2) what was the total cost of the test marketing of revised forms for retirement pension payments which were issued to 24,000 recipients in March this year;

(3) when a decision will be taken on revised forms giving those eligible for the state retirement pension a choice of payment method; and when such forms will be introduced.

Miss Widdecombe: Retirement pension claim forms are issued four months before potential entitlement begins and, so far, only a minority of the piloted claim forms have been returned. It is not possible to draw any statistically valid conclusions at this stage.

Decisions on any revision of the current claim form, including when any resultant new form might be introduced, will not be made until after the results of the trial are known.

The cost of the test is estimated to be around £22,000.

Quarry House

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, column *569*, what part of the £55·5 million of the cost of building Quarry house was spent on landscaping.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to put a precise figure on the landscaping costs because of the nature of the contract with the builders.

Earnings and Expenses

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reduce burdens on business caused by the different definitions of earnings and expenses used for national insurance and tax purposes.

Mr. Lilley: I have today announced the setting up of a working group to identify the options for reducing the administrative difficulties for business caused by differences in the rules for national insurance and income tax. The membership of the working group will include representatives of business as well as officials from my Department and the Inland Revenue. They will be encouraged to take a fresh look at the problems and will come forward with recommendations.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will benefit from the 100 per cent. rebates under the council tax.

Mr. Burt: It is estimated that in 1993-94 some 3·19 million households will receive 100 per cent. rebates under council tax benefit, out of a total council tax benefit caseload of 5·3 million.

Source: Figures rounded to the nearest 5,000 and based on actual council tax levels and data drawn from the 1989-90-91 Family Expenditure Surveys modelled at 1993-94 prices and benefit levels.

Rent Deposits

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many grants for rent deposits under the single payments system were not returned by landlords in the three years prior to its replacement by the social fund; and what was the annual cost of the non-returned deposits.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many grants for rent deposits were made under the single payments system in the three years prior to its replacement by the social fund; what was the annual cost; and what were unit costs as a proportion of the total single payment spending.

Mr. Scott: The available information is in the table.

Year	*Estimated expenditure (£ million)*	*Estimated claims (Thousands)*[1]	*Single payment expenditure (£ million)*
1985-86	3	30,000	335
1986-87	7	49,000	330
1987-88	10	[2]—	294

[1] To the nearest thousand.
[2] Unavailable.

The table indicates that deposits accounted for an estimated 2·1 per cent. of the total single payment expenditure over this period.

Benefits (Automated Credit Transfer)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of public expenditure by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Benefits Agency to encourage benefit claimants to have their benefits paid by automated credit transfer.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) on 26 April at columns *313-14*.

Information on methods of payment of social security benefits, including ACT, is included in a number of leaflets issued by the Benefits Agency.

Recently, the Benefits Agency piloted three versions of the retirement pension claim form. The cost of this trial was estimated to be around £22,000.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each of the organisations which have written to him on the subject of automated credit transfer and the implications for the viability of sub post offices; and if he will indicate which have been *(a)* favourable and *(b)* unfavourable.

Miss Widdecombe: We have recently received a substantial number of representations about automated credit transfer, including letters from a wide variety of organisations, from right hon. and hon. Members and from a number of individuals, arguing in favour of the continuing availability of post offices for the payment of benefits. We have also received correspondence in favour of ACT being available for a greater range of benefits.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to strengthen the role of employees in the administration of occupational pension scheme funds;

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to prohibit employers from having a controlling decision on *(a)* how occupational pension funds are used, *(b)* what the pension levels should be and *(c)* the use of these funds to pay off company debts.

Miss Widdecombe: The rights and interests of scheme members, pensioners and employers in occupational pension scheme are among the issues being considered by the Pension Law Review Committee. The committee was established, in June last year under the chairmanship of Professor Goode QC, to review the whole framework of law and regulation within which occupational pension schemes operate. It would be premature for the Government to comment on possible changes before the committee reports at the end of September.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the position of those whose occupational pension rights have been lessened by periods of unemployment; and what age group he estimates is most affected.

Miss Widdecombe: Members of occupational pension schemes who become unemployed are entitled to a preserved pension which is revalued in line with rises in prices of up to 5 per cent. a year until they reach the scheme's normal retirement age. On starting work again they can either leave their preserved pension where it is, or transfer their rights into their new employer's pension scheme or into a personal pension. Information on the ages of those involved is not available. We have no plans to change these provisions.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to improve the position of those whose occupational pensions are abated because they left early.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 9 November 1992 at column *563*.

WALES

Trawsfynydd

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what weight of plutonium has been created in the Trawsfynydd nuclear plant since it opened; and what information his Department has received from Nuclear Electric and its predecessor company in regard to movements of plutonium from the plant.

Mr. Eggar: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1986-87, estimates of the plutonium contained in the reactor discharges at Trawsfynydd power station have been published as part of the annual plutonium figures. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. Estimates for earlier years could be produced only at disproportionate cost. For the information supplied by operators on shipments, I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 3 December 1992, *Official Report*, column *346*.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give manufacturing output figures for Wales in 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1992 in constant prices, the percentage change from 1976 to 1992 and taking 1976 as 100, the United Kingdom manufacturing output change figures for the same intervening years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is given in the following table.

Index of manufacturing output, annual averages

	1985 = 100		*Percentage change since 1976*	
	Wales	*United Kingdom*	*Wales*	*United Kingdom*
1976	100·7	103·5	0·0	0·0
1981	93·0	91·0	−7·6	−12·1
1986	104·5	101·3	3·8	−2·1
1991	125·7	112·2	24·8	8·4
1992	127·2	111·4	26·3	7·6

Source: Welsh Office, CSO.

Council Tax

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the 1993-94 council tax for Wales is to be paid for by *(a)* single-person households, *(b)* two-person households and *(c)* three or more person households.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information required is not held centrally.

River Ebbw

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment his Department has made of the levels of chemical pollution in the River Ebbw.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This is a matter for the National Rivers Authority, which regularly monitors the river on a routine basis. I am advised by the authority that the results of the monitoring show water quality to be generally good and improving.

Pharmacies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to pay professional allowances to pharmacists dispensing over 2,000 scripts per month.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) on 20 May at column 314.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policies he has adopted to assist local pharmacies.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Local pharmacies may be eligible for a range of assistance to retail businesses which is provided through the enterprise initiative consultancy scheme, through training and enterprise councils, and through local enterprise agencies. Pharmacies in commercial improvement areas or commercial renewal areas may also qualify for assistance for commercial building improvement works under the Welsh Office's urban programme. For those pharmacies who are contracted to provide pharmaceutical services to the NHS, the arrangements for determining their remuneration are intended to give pharmacists a fair return for the level and quality of the services they provide. The essential small pharmacies scheme gives additional payments to improve the financial viability of small isolated pharmacies which provide essential NHS dispensing services to patients.

Managing in the 90s

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many firms in Clwyd have been helped by the organisation, Managing in the 90s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Clwyd-based companies, in common with their counterparts throughout the country, have benefited in a variety of ways from this extensive management best-practice awareness programme. Initially focusing on four areas of industrial performance—design, production, purchasing and quality—it has recently been extended to include marketing and innovation.

The programme reaches its audience through a range of media—publications, videos and events. I understand that literature and invitations to events are regularly dispatched to some 100 companies in the Clwyd area.

The programme was launched in Wales in June 1989 with two successful management action briefings, one of which was held at British Aerospace, Broughton, in Clwyd which attracted a capacity audience of predominantly local industrialists.

The programme acts as an umbrella and inspiration behind a wide range of other activities such as Newtech's Transforum with membership in excess of 50 which exists to help Clwyd and Gwynedd companies take advantage of technology transfer opportunities.

Late last year 24 companies attended a "Competing With the Best in Manufacturing" seminar in Holywell arranged under the M90's programme.

The flagship of the programme, the strategy roadshow, has visited Clwyd twice. It was at Deeside industrial estate for a week in September 1991 and more recently in February this year at British Aerospace, Broughton where it attracted 299 visitors over five days from 149 organisations.

Support for Products under Research

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will name the companies in Clwyd that have received financial assistance from the scheme, support for products under research; what was the amount of each award; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: SPUR is a valuable scheme designed to enable small and medium size companies to develop new products and processes which are technologically advanced.

In Wales, some 20 companies have been supported under the scheme so far. These include three companies located in Clwyd which have collectively received offers of assistance totalling £360,000.

These companies are:

Breger Gibson Ltd.	– offered up to £150,000
Depac Glideflare Ltd.	– offered up to £119,100
Sutures Ltd.	– offered up to £90,000

Environmental Protection

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the reed beds of over two hectares in extent in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Reed bed sites in Wales covering two hectares or more are as follows:

Clwyd
- Shotton Steelworks

Dyfed
- Ynys Eidol
- Ynys Hir
- Cors Fochno
- Teifi marshes
- Freshwater West, Castle Martin Corse
- Freshwater East
- Slebech
- Goodwick, Fishguard
- Newport
- Ritec Valley, Tenby Marsh
- Kilpaison Marsh, Rhoscrowther
- Pembrey Airfield, Banc-y-lord
- Pembrey Saltings
- Ffrwd
- Burry Port West
- Burry Port East
- Ashpits, Burry Port
- Pwll
- Techon Marsh
- Ffos Fach, Bynea
- Llangennech
- Kidwelly Castle

Mid Glamorgan
- Kenfig Pool

West Glamorgan
- Oxwich
- Crymlyn Bog
- Eglwys Nunydd (site 2)
- Crymlyn Burrows

Gwent
- Wentlooge Levels
- Caldicot Levels

Gwynedd
- Ynysmaen gwyn, Broadwater
- Arthod (ditches)
- Farchynys
- Penmaenpool
- Ynys
- Ystumllyn

Cors Llyferin
Penrhydlyniog, Pwellheli
Glanllynnau
Aber Dwyfor
Cors Gyfelog A'Cyclch
Aber Gwyrfai
Dolgarrog
Llyn Pencraig
Chwythlyn
Llyn Goddington
Rhoscolyn
Bagnol
Cerrig Moelion
Llyn Maelog
Llyn Penrhyn
Llyn Dinam
Llyn Cerrig Bach
Llyn Garreg Lwyd
Traeth Dulas
Plas Bog
Cors Bodeilo
Cors Goch
Llanlleiana
Llyn Bodgylched
Ty Mawr

Construction Industry

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the value of construction industry new orders according to sector at constant 1985 prices in Wales in each year from 1980 indicating the values of *(a)* total new orders, *(b)* housing new orders, *(c)* construction and industry new orders and *(d)* public infrastructure new orders.

Mr. David Hunt: Constant price data are available only for years until 1991 and the available information is given in the following tables.

Value of new orders obtained by contractors at constant 1985 prices

£ million

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
New housing:												
Public sector	61	27	51	53	23	17	30	36	36	32	45	34
Private sector	145	100	129	171	169	153	179	211	266	188	190	111
Total	206	127	180	223	192	170	209	247	302	220	235	145
Other new work:												
Public sector	284	292	259	204	226	214	329	204	194	247	227	344
Private sector:												
Industrial	98	89	54	67	104	61	67	78	150	129	134	172
Commercial	82	86	87	79	98	81	100	96	166	163	172	188
Total private sector orders	325	274	270	316	372	295	346	386	582	480	496	470
Total public sector orders	344	319	311	257	249	231	360	239	230	279	271	377
Grand total of new orders	670	594	581	573	620	526	706	625	812	759	767	847

Source: Department of the Environment.

Since the fourth quarter of 1992, the divisions under which the data on construction new orders are published have been changed and no data are available for 1992 under the old headings. As price deflators are not available on the new basis yet, the following table gives the information on the new basis at current prices since 1983.

Value of new orders obtained by contractors at current prices

£ million

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*[1]1992*
New housing:										
Public sector	49	22	17	31	38	42	42	61	45	67
Private sector	152	161	153	195	258	381	310	335	193	203
Other new work:										
Infrastructure	61	92	119	204	117	65	189	154	372	179
Public	137	127	105	134	107	180	154	190	163	162
Private sector:										
Industrial	59	98	53	67	79	162	161	149	171	76
Commercial	73	92	78	105	106	208	219	233	186	109
Grand total of new orders	530	592	526	736	704	1,031	1,073	1,121	1,132	796

Source: Department of the Environment.
[1] Provisional.

Education (Special Needs)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list on an annual basis the number of times the procedures under section 14 of the Education Act 1981 have been used, indicating the local education authorities involved, the special schools proposed for closure, the ones that were closed and the alternative provision made for them.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Comprehensive information is not available in the form requested. However, from 1988, the special schools subject to section 14 procedures, together with the date of my right hon. Friend's decision, are shown in the following list. Prior to 1988, the number of special schools in Wales by county and by year are shown in the relevant volume of "Statistics of Education in Wales".

County and School Proposal	Decision
South Glamorgan	
Closure of Prince of Wales Orthopaedic Hospital School to form a hospital class	March 1988 Approved
West Glamorgan	
Closure of Maytree School, Swansea; pupils from the Maytree Autistic Unit to transfer to Penybryn School, Swansea	June 1989 Approved
Gwynedd	
Closure of Ysgol Gogarth and Ysgol Wern Yr Wylan, Llandudno, and establishment of a new school in the premises of Ysgol Gogarth	December 1989 Approved
Gwent	
Closure of St. Lawrence Hospital School, Chepstow, to form a hospital class	December 1989 Approved
South Glamorgan	
Closure of Pentwyn, Presswood House and Preswylfa Schools, Cardiff, and the establishment of a new school at Pentwyn	Closures approved May 1992; new school approved subject to refurbishment work being done
Powys	
Closure of Cyfronydd, School and, in effect, its amalgamation with Brynllywarch School	Awaiting decision

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice has been issued directly or through the Curriculum Council for Wales, School Examinations and Assessment Council and Her Majesty's inspectorate in Wales about the teaching or modifying of the national curriculum for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Office has issued circulars to local education authorities and schools in Wales advising on the provision to be made for children with special educational needs within the national curriculum including, if necessary, the adaptation, modification or disapplication of national curriculum requirements. The Curriculum Council for Wales has issued non-statutory guidance for teachers on how to provide for pupils with special educational needs and the Schools Examinations and Assessment Council has produced and distributed to all schools in Wales teacher guidance material on the assessment of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils with special educational needs include those with emotional and behavioural problems.

Construction Industry

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the value of construction output according to sector at constant 1985 prices within Wales for each year since 1980 indicating *(a)* the total amount, *(b)* money allocated to housing, *(c)* money allocated to commercial and industrial work and *(d)* money allocated to public infrastructure.

Mr. David Hunt: The available information is given in the following table:

Total construction output in Wales at constant 1985 prices — *£ million*

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*[1]1992*
Housing (new works):													
Public sector	96	64	51	53	42	26	26	33	39	36	47	43	59
Private sector	138	125	90	140	127	105	117	123	171	199	200	113	141
Housing:													
Repair and Maintenance	258	241	238	250	266	277	298	326	341	339	334	295	283
Private Sector Industrial and Commercial													
New work	237	236	183	153	208	197	164	204	223	350	344	353	347
Repair and Maintenance	80	69	66	81	74	81	87	100	104	112	120	109	105
Public Works:													
New work	308	281	264	259	217	202	201	231	227	216	223	269	341
Repair and Maintenance	192	177	185	159	157	148	141	149	143	140	160	153	140
Total	1,310	1,194	1,077	1,096	1,091	1,036	1,034	1,166	1,248	1,391	1,430	1,336	1,416

Source: Department of the Environment
[1] Provisional

Institute of Welsh Affairs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from the Institute of Welsh Affairs over the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Several.

Housing Expenditure

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures showing the total gross capital expenditure on housing by *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* housing associations for each year from 1979-80, including estimated expenditure up to 1994-95; and if he will indicate the total spent on social housing (i) in cash terms and (ii) at constant 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on gross capital expenditure on housing is given in the following table. For

1994-95, local authorities and Housing for Wales will make firm expenditure plans in the light of the resources which will be announced later this year.

The total capital amount spent, by local authorities and housing associations, on social housing for the period 1979-80 to 1993-94 is estimated at £2,800 million in cash terms, and £3,600 million at constant 1991-92 prices. The local authority element includes Housing Revenue Account capital expenditure for each year and low cost home ownership expenditure for the period 1981-82 to 1991-92. Information on low cost home ownership is not available separately for the other years.

Gross capital expenditure on housing

£ million

	Local authority[1]	*Housing associations*
1979-80	124·5	24·5
1980-81	112·3	28·9
1981-82	95·9	33·9
1982-83	140·6	46·4
1983-84	216·2	48·8
1984-85	171·2	43·4
1985-86	140·3	43·6
1986-87	179·9	51·5
1987-88	226·2	70·6
1988-89	222·1	83·2
1989-90	308·1	112·4
1990-91	254·4	149·0
1991-92	237·5	184·6
1992-93	[2]294·7	[4]195·0
1993-94	[3]292·9	[5]197·3

[1] Local authority capital outturn returns for years 1979-80 to 1991-92.
[2] Local authority December forecast.
[3] Local authority April forecast.
[4] Provisional outturn. Excludes £35m for Acquisition Initiative.
[5] Plans. Excludes transfer of local authority resources.

Mortgage Assistance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has of the number of households assisted through mortgage rescue schemes in Wales; and if he will indicate the percentage of mortgage-holding households that have benefited from such schemes.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Tourism

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tourists from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad visited each county in Wales in each year since 1987.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information available for tourist visits to Wales is given in the following table:

Visitors to Wales[1]

	Overseas visitors (thousands)			*Domestic visitors (millions)*		
	North Wales	*Mid Wales*	*South Wales*	*North Wales*	*Mid Wales*	*South Wales*
1987	171·1	76·7	342·2	4·0	1·7	5·6
1988	159·3	82·6	348·1	3·5	1·9	5·6
1989	179·2	83·2	377·6	3·3	1·3	4·9
1990	204·0	74·8	401·2	3·0	1·6	3·8
1991	179·8	74·4	365·8	3·2	1·4	4·2

Source:
Overseas: International Passenger Survey.
Domestic: 1987-1989 figures—British Tourism Survey Monthly.
1989-1991 figures—United Kingdom Tourism Survey.
[1]North Wales: Clwyd and the Aberconwy, Ynys Môn, Arfon and Dwyfor districts of Gwynedd.
Mid Wales: The Meirionnydd district of Gwynedd, the Ceredigion district of Dyfed, the Montgomery, Radnor and part of the Brecknock districts of Powys.
South Wales: Dyfed (except the Ceredigion district), Mid, South and West Glamorgan, Gwent and part of the Brecknock district of Powys.

House Prices

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest information on the number of households with mortgages in Wales that have been affected by negative equity; and if he will express the figure *(a)* as a percentage of all households and *(b)* as a percentage of mortgage-holding households.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not available centrally.

Employment and Training Schemes

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the local employment and training systems schemes currently in action in Wales; and what encouragement is given by his Department to the formation of such schemes.

Mr. David Hunt: Local schemes for the benefit of the community are supported under the training for work and community action programmes (or systems) in Wales. I encourage such schemes especially where they provide opportunities for training and practising skills, but lists of schemes are not held centrally.

Planning Decisions

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received for each of the last 10 years and for each local authority in Wales complaining about planning decisions that have been taken locally in contravention of county structure plans.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: This information is not recorded centrally and such of it as might be available could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

House Building

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures on actual and projected new dwelling starts according to tenure in Wales in each year from 1985 to 1995 indicating *(a)* total dwellings, *(b)* local authority dwellings, *(c)* housing association, *(d)* total social housing dwellings and *(e)* private sector dwelings.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Figures on actual new dwellings started, analysed by expected tenure, are published in the annual Welsh Housing Statistics volume, copies of which are in the Library of the House. Projections are not available.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs have been *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded in Wales by regional selective assistance in areas defined by the Industry Act 1972, and amended in 1984, since its implementation.

Mr. David Hunt: Information about employment created or safeguarded by regional selective assistance since its implementation is not available centrally. However information about payments of RSA and employment created or safeguarded on cumulative offers accepted since 1 April 1982 is published in the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report. Further information is also published in the Welsh Office departmental report. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Brecon Beacons

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to secure the financial position of Brecon Beacons national park authority.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I asked the four county councils concerned to clarify their position with regard to the funding in 1993-94 of the Brecon Beacons national park and I am presently considering the response from the county solicitor of Powys county council, who has replied on behalf of all the councils. It would be inappropriate to comment further at this time.

Local Authority Employees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number employed in local authorities at the present time, and the estimated figure of employment for the proposed unitary authorities.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest available estimate of the total number employed in local authorities in Wales is 122,513 full-time equivalents. This is a provisional figure, as at December 1992, provided by the Local Government Management Board.

It will be for unitary authorities to decide their own management structures and staffing levels. The study of transitional costs by Touche Ross suggested that, for 23 authorities, the change in staff numbers might range from a net decrease of 490 to a net increase of 623.

Public Libraries

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to support and promote public libraries in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The statutory duty to provide a comprehensive public library service rests with the library authorities. The Department's activities in relation to public libraries conform with the responsibilities defined in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Performing Arts

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to support and promote the performing arts in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A number of Welsh Office programmes contribute to the support and promotion of the performing arts in Wales, but this is principally a matter for the Welsh Arts Council which is funded by the Department of National Heritage through the Arts Council of Great Britain. Responsibility for the Welsh Arts Council will transfer to the Secretary of State from 1 April 1994.

Police Services

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take the necessary steps to arrange for the prefix "Royal" to be added to each of the police services in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of abattoirs in Wales and their combined average throughput in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1991 and *(e)* 1992; and what are the most recent figures available.

Mr. David Hunt: Annual statistics derived from the survey of Welsh slaughterhouses are given in the following table. (Comparable figures are not available for the years 1970 and 1980—details for 1985 are therefore included):

Year	*Number of abattoirs open*[1]	*Average throughput per abattoir (LUs)*[2]
1985	72	5,454
1990	57	8,824
1991	55	9,964
1992	47	8,171

The most recent figures available show that 41 abattoirs in Wales are currently licensed to operate under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

[1] Open at any time during the year.

[2] 1 LU (livestock unit) = One adult cattle/calf or seven sheep or three pigs.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average *(a)* local authority expenditure and *(b)* Government grant to local authorities per head of population, in Wales for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: The latest information available is as follows:

	Revenue expenditure[1]	*Government grant*[2]
£/head[3]		
1990-91	773	486
1991-92[4]	869	627
1992-93[5]	930	655

[1] Includes expenditure required to be financed from revenue in the current year and the cost of financing capital expenditure (capital charges) including the debt repayments and interest payable on loans raised to finance past capital expenditure and direct revenue contributions towards capital expenditure in the current year.

[2] Comprises Revenue Support Grant, specific and supplementary grants within Aggregate external Finance, Community Charge Benefit Grant, Transitional Relief/Community Charge Reduction Scheme Grants and Community Charge Grant (1991-92).

[3] Based on Office of Population Censuses and Surveys mid-year estimates.

[4] Revised estimates.

[5] Budgets.

Integrated Administration and Control Systems

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of IACS forms issued had been returned by 15 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of 18,447 farmers in Wales had submitted their IACS application forms by the deadline of 15 May 1993. This accounts for 47 per cent. of the 40,000 forms which were issued although it was expected that around 18,000 would be returned.

The IACS literature package was sent to all known farmers in Wales (including sheep farmers who did not need to return a form this year).

Cattle Identification

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what concessions farmers will receive if they fail to receive their cattle identification documents within the correct time; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Producers who submit claims for premium (on forms BEEF 5 or 5A) and who have not received the appropriate CIDs by the end of the retention period should contact their divisional office immediately. Producers who have submitted applications for CIDs (on form BEEF 2) who have not received their documents within 21 days of submitting an application should follow the advice on the application form and contact their divisional office to explain their position. In both instances, divisional offices will seek to release the documents in time for marketing to proceed or premium to be claimed as appropriate.

Banw and Llanerfyl Primary School

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning the future of the Banw and Llanerfyl primary school.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have today indicated to the chairman of the governing body of Ysgol Gynradd Llanerfyl and to Powys county council that I am minded to approve the school's application for grant-maintained status subject to the date of implementation being amended to 1 September 1993.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people received IVF treatment in each of the last five years in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: IVF treatment under the national health service is available through the fertility clinic at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff. This was opened in May 1988 and saw its first patients in November 1988, but did not become fully operational until 1990.

Information about the number of treatments given in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1988	8
1989	69
1990	91
1991	153
1992	138

Source: UHW fertility clinic.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 27 May 1993

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Agency Letters

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will place in the Library copies of the recommendations submitted by *(a)* the Editor of the *Official Report*, *(b)* the Principal Clerk of the Table Office and *(c)* other sources in connection with the resolution agreed by the Administration Committee on publication of agency chief executives' letters and accompanying tables.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The terms of the Administration Committee's approval of arrangements for the publication of agency chief executive's letters in the *Official Report* are set out in the Committee's Minutes of Proceedings for 8 July 1992, HC 368-i to iv. It is not the practice of the Administration Committee to deposit in the Library papers which have not been reported to the House.

Telephone Bills

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what were the quarterly telephone bills for the Palace of Westminster, including outbuildings, for each of the last 10 years; what use has been made of Mercury Communications through least-cost routing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin *[holding answer 17 May 1993]*: It is not possible to provide details of quarterly telecommunications bills for the Palace of Westminster for the past 10 years. However, the annual bill for telephone messages for the last seven years is as follows:

	£
1987	471,000
1988	552,000
1989	561,000
1990	570,000
1991	690,000
1992	599,000

New technology installed in the Palace of Westminster telecommunications exchange in the summer of 1992 included a "least-cost routing" facility. At the same time, 125 of the outgoing lines of the exchange were converted to the Mercury network. These changes allow the automatic selection of the cheapest service for each outgoing message. Since October 1992, approximately 1·1 million calls lasting more than 20,000 hours have been carried on Mercury lines.

EDUCATION

Teacher Education

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if he will publish the advice received, and all correspondence, from Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools on the subject of teacher education and school-based teacher training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Under the Education (Schools) Act 1992, the question of publication is entirely a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. The Department for Education and Science was responsible for publishing Her Majesty's inspectorate's reports prepared before September 1992. It published a number of reports on teacher education, including one on school-based initial teacher training in England and Wales which was given wide distribution in January 1992.

Liverpool City Technology College

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the cost of acquiring land to be used as the Liverpool city technology college.

Mr. Forth: A site in Liverpool for possible use as a city technology college was acquired by the CTC Trust in February 1989 for £185,000 and sold in two parts in December 1990 and August 1991 for a total of £669,000.

Higher Education Student Charter

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many copies of the non-consultative version of the higher education student charter were printed before the publication on Friday 21 May of the consultative version; what was the cost of printing them; what was the total number of administrative hours spent preparing them; when they will be pulped; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Three and a half million copies of the charter for higher education were printed at a cost of £152,000. All copies have been pulped. Since my right hon. Friend announced our intention to publish further and higher education charters on 19 June 1992, the time of approximately one full-time equivalent offical has been devoted to the higher education charter initiative. The printing arrangements had to be made well in advance of the target date for publication given the large number of copies required. In the event, following further representations, my right hon. Friend agreed that wider formal consultations should be undertaken in particular to allow individual universities to have the opportunity to comment through the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

EMPLOYMENT

Asbestos

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress she has made towards banning all grades of asbestos; what discussions she has had at an EC level on this matter; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The importation, supply and use of the two types of asbestos most commonly associated with

disease—crocidolite (blue asbestos) and amosite (brown asbestos)—has been prohibited in the United Kingdom since 1986, although they have not been imported since 1972 and 1980 respectively. Since 1 January 1993, three further types of asbestos have been prohibited though these were not used commercially in the United Kingdom.

Chrysotile (white asbestos) is now the only type of asbestos allowed into the United Kingdom. Imports have dropped significantly in recent years and are now less than 10,000 tonnes annually. Negotiations are currently in progress on a European Community draft directive to ban chrysotile but with exemptions for certain uses. The Government are keen to avoid this resulting in the replacement chrysotile with substitutes which may be less safe, and support the proposed directive provided that exemptions are based on the relative risks of chrysotile and substitute materials in any particular application.

Ports (Accidents)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fatal accidents have taken place in the United Kingdom ports industry since July 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of fatal accidents occurring in docks and harbours in Great Britain between 1 July 1989 and 31 March 1992 are given in the table. Statistics for 1992-93 are not yet available. Accident statistics for Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Fatal accidents[1] in docks and harbours[2] as reported to the Health and Safety Executive's Factory and Agricultural Inspectorates—1 July 1989 to 1991-92[4]

Year	Fatalities
1 July 1989 to 31 March 1990	7
1990-91[3]	2
1991-92[4,3]	6
Total	15

[1] Includes accidents to employees (including trainees), self employed persons and members of the public injured as a result of someone else's work activity notified under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR).
[2] As defined by Standard Industrial Classification Class 74 and actify heading 7630.
[3] Year commencing 1 April.
[4] Provisional.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many industrial accidents have taken place in United Kingdom port activities since July 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of non-fatal injuries occurring in docks and harbours in Great Britain between 1 July 1989 and 31 March 1992 are given in the table. Statistics for 1992-93 are not yet available. Accident statistics for Northern Ireland are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Injuries[1] in docks and harbours[2] as reported to the health and safety executive's factory and agricultural inspectorates 1 July 1989 to 1991-92[6]

	Severity of injury		Total
	Major[4]	Over three days[5]	
1989-90[7]	80	406	486
1990-91[3]	113	498	611
1991-92[6,3]	88	469	557
Total	281	1,373	1,654

[1] Includes injuries to employees (including trainees), self employed persons and members of the public injured as a result of someone else's work activity notified under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 (RIDDOR).
[2] As defined by Standard Industrial Classification Class 74 and activity heading 7630.
[3] Year commending 1st April.
[4] As defined under RIDDOR but chiefly amputations, serious fractures and any other injury requiring hospitalisation for 24 hours.
[5] Any injury that results in an absence from normal work for more than three days.
[6] Provisional.
[7] 1 July 1989 to 31 March 1990.

Dock Workers (Compensation)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the inquiry commissioned from MDS-Transmodal by the Departments of Transport and Employment in 1991 into the cost to public funds of the compensation payments paid to former registered dock workers under the Dock Work Act 1989 has been completed; and if it will be published.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1991, the Departments of Employment and Transport commissioned MDS-Transmodal and Pieda plc to undertake a study into the effects on the port industry of the abolition of the dock labour scheme.

A report on the study is being prepared for publication. It is anticipated that the report will be published this year, and I will ensure that copies of the report are placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sex Discrimination

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action she is taking to lessen inequalities between women's and men's pay.

Mr. McLoughlin: In 1992, women's average hourly earnings—excluding overtime—were 79·2 per cent. of men's, the highest level ever, and the fifth consecutive year in which the differential between men's and women's pay had narrowed.

The pursuit of sound economic policies resulting in high productivity and low inflation have established the appropriate conditions for the recent success in further narrowing the differential between women's and men's pay. Further progress in this area will depend in part on sustaining and improving on these economic gains.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action she is taking to combat sex discrimination in the workplace.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, both as amended, make

discrimination on grounds of sex in contractual and non-contractual employment matters unlawful. The Department publishes and distributes widely explanatory guides to the legislation.

The Department also funds the Equal Opportunities Commission, which has a statutory duty to work towards the elimination of discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Sexual Harassment

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what action she is taking to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government abhor sexual harassment as a particularly nasty form of sex discrimination which can have unacceptable repercussions in the workplace.

It is well established in law that in certain circumstances sexual harassment can amount to sex discrimination, contrary to the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

The Department has published two booklets explaining to employers and employees how to combat sexual harassment at work. Both booklets have been widely distributed throughout industry.

The Government have also brought forward an amendment to the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill which will give industrial tribunals a discretionary power to protect those involved in sexual harassment cases from intrusive or offensive reporting of their cases.

Personal Contracts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration she has given to the implications of the recent Court of Appeal ruling that companies which grant pay rises only to employees accepting personal contracts are in contravention of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 for employment practices in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have given careful consideration to the recent Court of Appeal decisions on this issue. As a result of these judgments, the law on action short of dismissal, which is now contained in section 146 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, has been left in a state of some confusion. Section 146 was never intended to interfere in an employer's freedom to determine negotiating arrangements that best suit his business needs.

In order to clarify the law on action short of dismissal, we have therefore introduced an amendment to the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Bill, which completed its stages in another place on Monday 24 May. This provision makes it clear that action taken by an employer for the purpose of changing his negotiating arrangements is not action taken against an individual within the scope of section 146.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated amount to be spent in 1993-94 in rent and other associated costs for the offices of her Department in Caxton house, Tothill street, London.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Estimated expenditure by the Department for rent and other associated accommodation costs in Caxton house, Tothill street in 1993-94 is £12·75 million made up as follows:

	£ million
Rent paid to Property Holdings (including VAT)	8·88
Rates	2·91
Maintenance costs	0·96

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. T. Barber

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action his Department has taken in response to the representations made to him about the case of Mr. T. Barber of 6 Bennett rise, Huncote, Leicestershire, regarding his work as a bailiff at Leicester county court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mortgaged Properties (Repossession)

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what were the main conclusions of his Department's review of county court rules concerning general possession procedures in relation to mortgaged properties.

Mr. John Taylor: The main conclusions of the review of the handling of mortgage possession cases were that the court needed to be provided with more information about the basis of the claim and the defendant's circumstances. New rules and forms that achieve these aims are currently being drafted.

Judiciary (Training)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of training the judiciary and the magistracy in the procedures to be adopted under the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Before the Criminal Justice Act 1991 came into force in October 1992, all judges of the Crown court and all magistrates were trained in its requirements. Judges and recorders attended sentencing conferences on their own circuits and special sessions dedicated to studying the Act's provisions were incorporated in the standard refresher and induction courses run centrally by the Judicial Studies Board. Written material was also issued. In addition, a training package, funded by the Home Office, was provided for justices' clerks to enable them to train justices of the peace. It is not possible to quantify the cost in detail because of the local nature of most of the training, but a very rough estimate would be approximately £250,000.

Trainee Lawyers (Grants)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many representations his Department has received in the last 12 months regarding discretionary grants made by local authorities to trainee lawyers.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department has received four representations from individual students, as well as representations from the Law Society, and from the chairman of the Trainee Solicitors Group.

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action he is taking to encourage *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minority groups to pursue careers in the legal profession.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Although he has no direct responsibilities in this field, the Lord Chancellor is concerned to ensure equality of opportunity between all persons intending to be employed in the provision of legal services. Section 64 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 extends the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976 to the Bar in England and Wales. For those who seek judicial office, the Lord Chancellor's policy is to appoint those best qualified, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, political affiliation or religion. Without prejudice to this overriding principle, the Lord Chancellor has stressed publicly, and will continue to do so, that he would like more women and those of ethnic origin who are suitably qualified to be appointed to the judiciary.

The Government recognised the importance of encouraging equality of opportunity when it established the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal education and conduct, which is independent of the Government. The Act requires the committee to have regard to the desirability of equal opportunity when fulfilling its general duty of assisting in the maintenance and development of standards in the training and conduct of those offering legal services. The committee has commenced a major review of legal education and training; this issue will be considered as part of that exercise.

Justices (Appointments)

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether his Department applies any restrictions based on physical, sensory or mental impairments in the appointment of *(a)* justices of the peace, *(b)* coroners and *(c)* judges.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In the appointment of judges and magistrates, the Lord Chancellor must be satisfied in the public interest that a candidate has the necessary physical and mental abilities to carry out the full range of duties of the post and any individual candidate is considered on his or her merits in the light of their particular circumstances. I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department that coroners are appointed by local authorities in accordance with qualifications laid down in the Coroners Act 1988, as amended by the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990.

Court Service

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has for organisational change in the management of the court service.

Mr. John M. Taylor: After detailed consideration, the Lord Chancellor has concluded that a move to executive agency status is the right way forward for the court service and he envisages setting up the service as an agency in April 1995.

Agency status will provide the management of the court service with a clearer focus on the job to be done, and greater flexibility to respond to the changing needs of all court users.

The agency will comprise the staff of the unified court service. It will exclude the staff of the magistrates court service, which is locally managed and whose organisation is dealt with in the White Paper "A Framework for Local Justice".

The conversion of the court service into an agency will not affect the judiciary, either in its independent role and functions or in its relations with the administration.

Consultation with the judiciary and the trade union side on this subject has recently begun and will continue with them, and with other interested parties, throughout the implementation period.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current projects and their value that are currently being funded in Indonesia by the Overseas Development Administration, European Community, World bank, Asian Development bank and other aid-giving bodies for which he is responsible.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Projects funded by ODA from the United Kingdom/Indonesia grant programme are:

Title	*Allocation £ million*
Coastal Fisheries	0·38
Animal Health—Phase 4	1·69
Coastal Prawn Culture	1·30
Tropical Forestry Management	10·77
Gas Distribution	9·70
Hydrocarbon Basin Assessment	5·98
Active Learning Professional Support	1·71
Library Development	0·75
English Language Training (National Level)	1·33
Institutional English Language Training	1·79
Biotechnology	0·43
South Sumatra Geological Survey	2·26
Regional Government Finance	0·91
Police Management Training	0·97
Development of Professional Training for Civil Engineering Consultants	1·74
Development of Mini-Hydros	5·61
Development of Thermal Power Plant Personnel Training Capability—Phase 3	1·20

We also support the activities in Indonesia of British non-governmental organisations such as Voluntary Services Overseas, Oxfam and Christian Aid. The Commonwealth Development Corporation, for which the principal source of finance is the British aid programme, has investments in Indonesia totalling £72 million, covering nine projects in sectors such as textiles, cement production, power and plantation crops.

Projects supported by the ODA under concessional loan arrangements include the following:

Title	Soft loan allocation £ million
Cigading-Serpong Railway Rehabilitation	24·690
Citayam-Cibinong Railway (New Line)	20·105
Steel Bridging Components	3·669
Forestry Radio Communications Network	34·111
Airport Security Systems	10·455
Flight Simulator for Civil Aircraft	4·659
Shortwave Radio Transmitters for National Broadcasting Network	26·911
Additional Generating Capacity for Jambi Power Plant	5·345
Equipment for Universities in Sumatra and Kalimantan	13·671

Most European Community aid to Indonesia is provided through the Community's Asia/Latin America programme, of which the United Kingdom contributes around 16 per cent. Recent project approvals have been as follows:

Title	Allocation £ million	Mecu[1]
Punggur Utara Irrigation Project	23·07	(29·3)
North Bali Irrigation and Water Supply	8·11	(10·3)
Forest Sector Support Programme	20·47	(26·0)

[1] Million European currency units.

The World bank has an active portfolio of 61 loans with a cumulative value of approximately $7·9 billion. For the Asian Development bank, the corresponding figures are 62 and $5·6 billion. For the International Fund for Agricultural Development, they are four and $66 million. Details of loan approvals are contained in the annual reports of these institutions, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the European countries visited in each of the last three years by the European committee for the prevention of torture.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European committee for the prevention of torture (CPT) has visited the following countries in the last three years:

1990: Austria, Denmark, Malta, Turkey, United Kingdom.
1991: France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey.
1992: Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, San Marino, Turkey.
1993: Luxembourg, Greece, Liechtenstein.

The CPT plans to visit Belgium, Iceland, Ireland and Norway by the end of the year. The CPT will then have visited all the states party to the convention.

Tibet

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received regarding the Chinese occupation of Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I have received a number of letters and other expressions of concern about the situation in Tibet from hon. Members of the House and others. We share the concern about human rights there and particularly about the latest reports of detentions and demonstrations. With our European Community partners, we have been pursuing these matters with the Chinese authorities.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had urging a boycott of Chinese goods in protest at the Chinese occupation of Tibet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: None. We have no plans to introduce such a boycott.

Mrs. Hamida Mattoo

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information about the death of Mrs. Hamida Mattoo he has received through the post in New Delhi from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs: what representations have been made to the Indian high commission in London about the circumstances of Mrs. Mattoo's death; when he intends to write to the hon. Member for Bradford, West following his letter of 15 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Our high commissioner in Delhi took up the case with the Indian authorities and received a fact sheet from the Indian Home Ministry on 26 May which states that Mrs. Mattoo was killed on 3 March 1993 in crossfire between Indian security personnel and terrorists. I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly with details of the fact sheet. We have not made representations to the Indian high commissioner in London about Mrs. Mattoo's death.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministers (Cash Payments)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Prime Minister if Departments in their capacity as employers notify the Inland Revenue when cash payments are made to Ministers to relieve financial pressures which affect their performance as Ministers.

The Prime Minister: I know of no such payments.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Prime Minister what considerations underlie the policies of Her Majesty's Government with respect to giving substantive answers to parliamentary questions seeking details of the names, occupations and remuneration of Members of *(a)* health boards in Scotland and *(b)* district health authorities in England.

The Prime Minister: Non-executive health board members in Scotland are appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and information on them is therefore held centrally and given in response to parliamentary questions. Non-executive members of district health authorities in England, however, are appointed by regional health authorities and not by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. Executive members of health boards in Scotland and

district health authorities in England are appointed by their respective board or authority. Information on them, therefore, is not currently available centrally.

The level of remuneration for health authority members in England, and for health board members in Scotland, is set centrally and this information is always provided in response to parliamentary questions.

Merlin Reactor

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Department is responsible for overseeing the decommissioning of the Merlin reactor at Aldermaston.

The Prime Minister: The nuclear installations inspectorate, which is now part of the Health and Safety Executive, was responsible for overseeing the decommissioning.

Kashmir

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *33*, what information has been received through the high commission in New Delhi from the Indian Government about Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: On 26 May, our high commission in New Delhi received a lengthy aide memoire from the Indian Home Ministry. This stated that both Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik are in custody in Jammu where they are awaiting trial. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will be writing to the hon. Gentleman with details.

School Visits

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the local authority maintained schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges that he has visited since taking his present office.

The Prime Minister: I have visited a number of local authority maintained schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a further statement about the Government's commitment to making a contribution to the Jubilee line extension.

The Prime Minister: The Government, and I personally, remain committed to the Jubilee line extension as a major addition to the infrastructure of docklands and of London's transport. We have earmarked public funds for the line. As soon as negotiations with the companies involved in the financing of Canary Wharf have been concluded satisfactorily my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will authorise the start of construction and the first tranche of those funds will be made available. The line will then be built within an estimated 53 months. The draft funding agreement specifies that swingeing penalty payments will come into force if the line is not completed seven months after that.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Advisory Committees

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make available a list of independent Government advisory committees dealing with human health, environmental protection and animal welfare, for which a list of members' registered interests are available, and the dates on which these registers were introduced.

Mr. Robert Jackson: Registers of members interests relating to the matters under consideration are published for the following committees.

Committee	*Year introduced*
Committee on the Safety of Medicines	1987
Medicines Commission	1987
British Pharmacopoeia Commission	1987
Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances	1991

A register of members' interests is maintained for the Farm Animal Welfare Council by its secretariat.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans the Government have for the future of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Mr. Waldegrave: HMSO has made great strides since its establishment as one of the first executive agencies in 1988. The 1992 trading fund accounts, published today, show a current cost profit of £6·5 million against a financial target of £6 million—the fourth successive year in which profitability has increased. In order to build on this growing commercialism, I am commissioning a consultancy study to explore the scope for further commercialisation of the operations of HMSO. The study will incorporate the review of status which is required periodically of all executive agencies. It will also take account of the Government's concern to ensure that Parliament, Departments and agencies continue to obtain value for money when purchasing the products and services provided by HMSO.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufactures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the factors determining the level of import penetration of the United Kingdom for manufacturers since *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the year ended June 1989; and to what extent the increase in import penetration is due to the increase in the real exchange rate since the second half of 1973.

Mr. Nelson: Rising import penetration is largely a consequence of the greater specialisation of international production, and has been experienced by virtually all other industrialised countries. The counterpart to this rising import penetration is higher exports. United Kingdom export volumes were at record levels at the end of 1992 and have grown faster than gross domestic product as a whole since 1979.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the retail prices index for *(a)* goods other than food, fuel and alcoholic drink and *(b)* services for each year since 1987 and for each month since August 1992; and what were the increases for the same periods in (i) earnings of manual workers in manufacturing industry, (ii) earnings of white-collar workers in the private sector and (iii) producer prices for manufacturing.

Mr. Nelson: The information for *(a)* and *(b)* is not available in the form requested and can only be produced at disproportionate cost.

The following table gives average gross weekly earnings of full time employees on adult rates with pay not affected by absence for April each year.

	Manual employees in manufacturing		*Non-manuals in private sector*	
April	*Mean (£)*	*Increase over 12 months (per cent.)*	*Mean (£)*	*Increase over 12 months (per cent.)*
1986	169·6	—	203·9	—
1987	181·1	6·8	222·8	8·7
1988	195·5	8·0	247·6	11·0
1989	212·1	8·5	272·3	9·8
1990	231·1	9·0	300·2	10·2
1991	241·9	4·3	318·2	7·6
1992	258·9	7·0	337·9	6·2

Source: New Earnings Survey.

The data for producer prices (home sales) for all manufacturing industries are as shown:

	Index (1985 = 100)	*Percentage increase on year earlier*
1987	108·3	3·8
1988	113·2	4·5
1989	119·0	5·1
1990	126·0	5·9
1991	133·0	5·6
1992	138·0	3·8
August 1992	138·5	3·4
September 1992	138·6	3·4
October 1992	138·7	3·3
November 1992	139·2	3·3
December 1992	139·5	3·5
January 1993	140·7	3·6
February 1993	141·4	3·7
March 1993	[1]142·4	[1]3·7
April 1993	[1]143·0	[1]3·8

[1] Provisional.

"The Sunday Times" (Letter)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the sending of a letter with reference number IDT ASS./DOCS/1.11.5. by an official in his Department to the political editor of *The Sunday Times*.

Mr. Lamont: I do not comment on letters sent on a "not for publication" basis.

Protection Money (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that tax relief is not granted for protection money in Northern Ireland; what estimate he has made of the extent of this abuse of the tax relief system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: There is little evidence of tax relief for protection money being widely granted in Northern Ireland, but we are looking into the matter in order to find an appropriate solution.

Income Tax

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are taxed on *(a)* PAYE, *(b)* schedule D and *(c)* schedule E basis; and what is the tax yield for each category.

Mr. Dorrell: Available estimates for 1992-93 are as follows:

Source of income	*Number of individual taxpayer[1] (millions)*	*Tax yield[2] (£ billion)*
PAYE and other Schedule E	23·2	49·7
Schedule D[3]	3·1	7·5

[1] A taxpayer with both a schedule E and schedule D source of income is included in both rows of the table.
[2] The tax yield represents the tax liability on each type of income where that income is regarded as the top slice of a person's income.
[3] Excluding interest taxed at source.

Pensions

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of the public sector pensions payable in each of the next 20 years assuming annual inflation of *(a)* 2 per cent., *(b)* 4 per cent. and *(c)* 6 per cent. and in respect of the next three years the proportion that such pensions are as a percentage of forecast gross domestic product.

Mr. Portillo: The data requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Costs

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 26 April, *Official Report*, columns *292-94*, what amount of additional employment costs is incurred by each Department in addition to wages and salaries.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is no longer collected centrally. The table sets out the information in respect of central Government Departments for 1991-92, the last year available.

	1991-92 £ million
Defence	238·9
FCO (including ODA)	50·0
Agriculture	17·5
Trade and Industry	20·9
Employment	70·5
Transport	16·0
Environment	60·3

	1991-92 £ million
Home Office	63·0
Legal Departments	49·4
Education	7·9
Heritage	0·1
Health	16·7
Social Security	61·6
Scotland	15·1
Wales	3·4
Northern Ireland	28·0
Chancellor's Departments	95·0
Cabinet Office etc.	3·1
	817·6

Financial Regulation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the Securities and Investments Board report on the state of financial regulation; and if he intends to make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 25 May, *Official Report*, columns *540-42*.

Taxation

Ms Harman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish figures on the same basis as table 1 of appendix 4 to "Economic Trends", January 1992, on the total percentage of gross income accounted for by taxes of all kinds paid by *(a)* the bottom quintile of households and *(b)* the top quintile for households ranked by equivalised disposable income for 1991; and if he will estimate the same quintile groups on the same basis for each year from 1992 to 1996;

(2) if he will publish figures on the same basis as table 4 of appendix 1 to "Economic Trends", January 1992, on the total percentage of gross income accounted for by taxes of all kinds paid by *(a)* the bottom decile of households and *(b)* the top decile for households ranked by equivalised disposable income for 1991; and if he will estimate the same quintile groups on the same basis for each year from 1992 to 1996.

Mr. Nelson: The results for 1991 will be published in the May 1993 edition of "Economic Trends", due out on Wednesday 2 June. The required ratios can be derived from the figures in table 3, appendix 1, which is on the same basis as table 4, appendix 1 in the January 1992 edition of "Economic Trends".

The figures are based on the family expenditure survey. Projections are not available.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what savings would accrue to the Treasury if MIRAS was phased out in three equal stages in three years.

Mr. Dorrell: The cost of mortgage interest tax relief at the proposed rate of 20 per cent. for 1994-95 is estimated to be £3·6 billion. Based on the estimated 1994-95 distribution of mortgages, if the relief were phased out in equal stages over a three-year period the estimated yield would be £1·2 billion, £2·4 billion and £3·6 billion.

These estimates adopt the conventional assumption that there will be no change in interest rates from the current rate of 8 per cent.

Civil Service

Mr. Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual value of 6 per cent. of the civil service pay bill; and what is the total annual expenditure on civil service pensions.

Mr. Portillo: In 1992-93, 6 per cent. of the civil service pay bill—excluding the pay costs of civil servants working in trading funds and trading bodies, and MOD civilians working in non-support areas—amounted to £704 million. Pensions paid to retired civil servants in the same year totalled £1,720 million.

Economic Policy (Environmental Impact)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all conferences and meetings of intergovernmental organisations he and Ministers of his Department have attended over the past year on the environmental impacts of economic and financial policy.

Sir John Cope: Treasury Ministers attend numerous meetings of intergovernmental organisations at which environmental issues may arise. It would not be practical to list all conferences and meetings of intergovernmental organisations which have touched on environmental issues.

EC Finance Ministers Meeting

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of European Finance Ministers.

Mr. Lamont: European Community Finance Ministers held an informal meeting with central bank governors in Kolding, Denmark on 21 to 23 May. The Governor of the Bank of England and I represented the United Kingdom.

The meeting discussed reports by the Monetary Committee and Central Bank Governors Committee on recent events in the exchange rate mechanism. It was agreed that specific conditions had applied in September 1992 with, in particular, an exceptionally large differential between United States and European interest rates. Member states emphasised the need for greater economic convergence and reaffirmed their support for the European monetary system. I made clear that the return of sterling to the ERM could not be contemplated until the requirements of United Kingdom and German monetary policy had come more closely into line. Copies of the reports of the Monetary Committee and Central Bank Governors Committee have been placed in the Library of the House.

Ministers also discussed German proposals for a harmonised system of withholding tax on interest paid to EC residents. It was agreed that these ideas needed further preparation before being considered by the Council. In addition, there was a discussion of the issue of unitary taxation in the United States, in the light of my announcement to the House on 13 May, *Official Report*, column *528*. Other member states strongly supported the United Kingdom position and it was agreed that the

presidency would write to the United States Administration underlining the importance member states attach to an early resolution of the problem.

The meeting also examined the relationship between environmental and economic policies and briefly discussed the Commission's proposals for an EC carbon/energy tax. This proposal is expected to be discussed by the Council at its next meeting.

Finally, Ministers discussed the unemployment situation in the Community and their remit from the Edinburgh European Council to consider measures to improve the functioning of the labour market.

The meeting was informal and there were therefore no votes or formal decisions.

Local Government Borrowing

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether local authorities are able to borrow from financial institutions outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Portillo: The Treasury has today issued four general consents. Three of those consents, taken together with complementary approvals given by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales, allow local authorities in England and Wales to borrow in sterling from any credit institution provided it is authorised by the supervisory authority of an EC member state. The fourth allows local authorities in Scotland to borrow in sterling from EC credit institutions.

These measures, which have been taken under section 43 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and under paragraph 4 of schedule 3 to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1975, make clear the interpretation of the legislation in England and Wales and ensure compliance with the single European market in banking services.

HEALTH

Young People in Care

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the operation of those provisions of the Children Act 1989 relating to assistance to young persons leaving care.

Mr. Yeo: We are closely monitoring the implementation of the Children Act 1989 as a whole, including the after-care provisions. A report on the first year's operation of the Act was presented to Parliament on 4 February 1993.

Mental Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 27 April, *Official Report*, column *345*, when the mental health task force is to begin collecting information on the closure of mental hospitals; when the data will be made publicly available; and what is the task force's definition of a long-stay psychiatric hospital.

Mr. Yeo: The mental health task force has begun to collect information on the closure of long-stay mental illness hospitals. It intends to complete an analysis of initial returns by the end of July, which I will make available. Information is being collected on those hospitals listed as mental illness hospitals with more than 100 beds in 1960 and which are still open, plus hospitals opened since then with more than 100 beds which are predominantly mental illness hospitals.

Colorectal Cancer

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of death from colorectal cancer have occurred in women and men in each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 24 March at columns *617-20* for figures for 1987 to 1991. Information for 1992, the latest year for which information is available, is shown in the table.

Numbers of deaths from malignant neoplasms of the colon (ICD 153)[1] and malignant neoplasms of the rectum, rectosigmoid junction and anus (ICD 154)[1] by sex in England and Wales 1992

	Number
Males	8,749
Females	8,654

[1] ICD—International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

Occult Blood

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to publish guidance to doctors in relation to screening for occult blood.

Mr. Sackville: We have no plans to issue guidance at this time.

Fertility Treatment

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to issue guidelines about fertility treatment to unmarried couples or to individuals who already have children.

Mr. Sackville: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's code of practice gives guidance to fertility treatment centres. This includes advice on the factors to be considered by clinicians when considering an individual's suitability for treatment. These include the welfare of any child who may be born as a result of treatment and of any existing children in the family.

There are also guidelines for clinicians published by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. In the light of well-publicised recent cases, the Chief Medical Officer has already had discussions with the president of the royal college about these guidelines and these discussions will continue.

The Government have made it clear that health authorities should think carefully before providing fertility treatment to people without a stable family background. If there is evidence that this is not being followed, we will examine what further action needs to be taken.

Human Growth Hormone Treatment

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients who received human growth hormone treatment have utilised the helpline or availed themselves of the counselling provided through her Department; what help or advice is being offered with particular reference to financial matters, including life insurance availability and mortgages; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The helpline is provided by the department of growth and development at the Institute of Child Health of Great Ormond Street hospital. No record of the number of telephone inquiries has been maintained but the institute is also providing counselling for patients treated at one of the three London growth centres; of the 711 patients treated, 295 have asked for and received counselling. Details of the numbers of patients who have availed themselves of the counselling services provided elsewhere in the country are currently being collected. I understand that patients experiencing difficulty in obtaining life insurance or mortgages are advised to make inquiries across a range of providers of these services, since the terms and conditions very often vary.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations she has received about financial support for those who received human growth hormone treatment and may now be at risk of contracting Creutzfeldt Jakob disease; and what estimate she has made of the cost of setting up an insurance fund for such people.

Mr. Yeo: We have received a number of representations, but as the treatment conformed with the best known scientific and clinical practice of the time we do not accept that there are grounds for financial support over and above the benefits which are available under the Social Security Acts. No estimate has therefore been made of the cost of a separate insurance fund.

Beverley Allitt

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors she took into account when deciding what type of further investigation to hold into the events at Grantham and Kesteven general hospital between February and April 1991 which were the subject of the recent trial of former nurse Beverley Allitt; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In deciding the form of inquiry, my overriding consideration was how to establish the facts behind the horrific Beverley Allitt case in the most rigorous and effective way possible, and ensure that the NHS learns any lessons for the future. The questions the parents want answered are the ones I want answered, and they must be properly and fully answered.

After careful consideration, I decided that this will best be achieved through an independent investigative inquiry, led by Sir Cecil Clothier, QC who has enormous experience in these matters. His advice, based on that long experience, was that, in cases such as this, the truth may more readily emerge in such an inquiry than in an adversarial public forum where witnesses may feel under strong external pressures. I would not have hesitated to order a public inquiry if I had thought that it would uncover the facts more effectively than the inquiry now being undertaken by Sir Cecil and his team.

In ordering the Clothier inquiry, I have obviously been concerned to establish confidence in it. Sir Cecil must be able to see all the witnesses and papers he requires. If necessary, I will give him the statutory powers to do so. He and his team will be acting independently of the parties involved. He will conduct his inquiry in London, away from the scene of Allitt's crimes. I have asked him to proceed as quickly as possible, consistent with establishing the truth, and to publish his report in full. I will, of course, do whatever is necessary to ensure that all possible steps are taken to ensure there is no repeat of such horrific and tragic events.

Clinical Complaints

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the complaints dealt with under the clinical complaints procedure during *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1992 were upheld.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Drug Use

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she intends to publish the research report from Durham university, prepared for her Department, on the prevalence of drug use among young people; in what form it will be published; and whether the publication will be the full report or a summary.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 25 May at column *510*.

NHS Staff Grading Appeals

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS staff grading appeals are outstanding in *(a)* the West Midlands regional health authority area and *(b)* South Birmingham health authority.

Mr. Yeo: There are currently 3,068 staff grading appeals outstanding in the West Midlands regional health authority area, of which 783 are outstanding for South Birmingham health authority.

Hospitals (Transport Facilities)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy on the co-ordination of hospital planning and the provision of transport facilities for patients and their visitors; and on what grounds she would refuse an application by a health authority or hospital trust for a change in the services it offered because of such transportation considerations.

Mr. Sackville: Ambulance transport for national health service patients is provided, free of charge, on the basis of medical need as determined by a clinician. Patients without a medical need for transport may, exceptionally, be transported by the ambulance service, but a charge may be made. Visitors must make their own transport arrangements. There are no plans to change the basis of ambulance transport provision.

Merseyside Health Bodies

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the members of the regional and district health authorities, and hospital trusts on Merseyside, indicating when they were appointed, and their professional backgrounds.

Mr. Yeo: The chairman and non-executive members of the regional health authority, the chairmen and non-executive directors of national health service trusts, and the chairmen of district health authorities in Mersey

region are listed in the table, together with the dates from which their current appointments commenced. Information relating specifically to their professional backgrounds is not available centrally, but the most up-to-date information held on their occupations is listed.

The appointment of non-executive members of district health authorities is a matter for the regional health authority. Information on them, therefore, is not available centrally. Executive members of NHS authorities and trusts are appointed by their respective authority or trust, and therefore information on them is also not available centrally.

Name	*Appointment date*	*Occupation*
Mersey RHA Membership (one vacancy)		
Professor A. Breckenridge (Chairman)	12 January 1993	Professor of Pharmacology
Mrs. R. H. Hawley	27 July 1990	—
Mrs. J. E. Timms	1 April 1993	Charity worker
Mr. J. R. Halliday	15 February 1993	Company chairman
Mr. B. Jenkins	1 November 1991	Company chairman
Chairmen of Mersey DHAs (three vacancies)		
Mr. J. Ross (Chester)	4 November 1991	Retired BR manager
Mr. F. R. Ludlow (Southport and Formby)	1 November 1991	Insurance consultant
Mr. G. Murray (St. Helens and Knowsley)	1 October 1992	Business executive
Mr. D. H. Tod (Liverpool)	4 November 1992	Company director
Mr. D. Hannah (Warrington)	1 April 1990	General manager
Mr. R. S. Gordon (Wirral)	1 April 1993	Underwriter
Mr. S. H. Cussons (Macclesfield)	9 November 1992	Chartered accountant

National Health Service Trusts: Chairmen and non-executive appointments

The Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mr. Peter Wright—Industrial pharmacist
Non-executives:
Mr. D. Snewin—Group sales manager
Mr. M. Taylor—Chief executive
Ms J. Pilkington—Nursing consultant
Ms M. Craddock—Co-op manageress
Mr. M. Hughes—Vernons Pools executive

Liverpool Obstetrics and Gynaecology Services National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mrs. J. Greensmith—Management consultant
Non-executives:
Mrs. G. Arden—Solicitor
Ms L. Bailey—Stockbroker
Mr. D. Antonia—Chartered accountant
Mr. A. Waterworth—Ex-engineering executive
Mrs. C. Parnaby—Midwife

Southport and Formby National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mrs. M. Pedlar—Managing director
Non-executives:
Mr. M. Landau—Littlewoods executive
Mr. A. R. Thomson—Bank manager
Mr. K. Sowerby—Chartered accountant
Mr. D. P. Rimmer—Deputy Director Social Services
Ms C. Aitken—

Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mrs. Brenda Dowding—Borough councillor
Non-executives:
Mr. R. Berry—Health and Safety director
Dr. D. Jones—Retired CMO
Mr. P. Marchant—
Mr. G. Bush—Retired consultant
Mr. J. Teare (appointed from 16 September 1992)—Chartered accountant

Mersey Regional Ambulance Service National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mr. G. Perks—Retired ICI manager
Non-executives:
Mr. S. Mayne—Managing director
Mr. D. Kempton—Company director
Mr. N. Wilson—Retirement home owner
Ms R. Webster—Nursing lecturer
Mr. G. Thomas—Ex-chief executive

St. Helens and Knowsley Community Health National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mrs. D. Charnock—Management consultant
Non-executives:
Professor R. Gee—Director HE College
Mr. R. Seneschall—Retired managing director
Mr. A. Chick—Director YMCA
Mrs. J. Bowden (appointed from 1 February 1992)—Solicitor
Mr. R. F. Dewhirst (appointed from 11 January 1993)—Quality co-ordinator

Aintree Hospitals National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Robin Farmer—Commercial manager
Non-executives:
Mrs. M. Swinson—Tax consultant
Mr. J. B. Cooper—Medical machinery consultant
Mr. A. McMinn—Company chairman
Mr. R. Snelgrove—Retired bank manager
Dr. J. Ensor (appointed from 18 November 1992)—M & S Medical officer

The North Mersey Community National Health Service Trust (Liverpool Community and Priority)
Appointed from 1 November 1991
Chairman: Mr. R. James—Chartered accountant
Non-executives:
Mr. K. Hutchinson—Managing director
Mr. P. Fletcher—Retired finance director
Mrs. J. Hall—Teacher
Ms M. Kitchen—Journalist
Mr. J. Barton—Head teacher

Broadgreen Hospital National Health Service Trust
Chairman: Mr. F. A. Fenney (appointed from 13 July 1992)—Retired personnel manager
Non-executives:
(Appointed from 21 December 1990)
Mr. P. Ashworth—Electrical engineer
Mr. P. Stoney—Lecturer
Mr. J. Miller
Mrs. A. Toyne (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Teacher

Mr. R. Bark-Jones (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Solicitor

Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital and Community Services National Health Service Trust
(Appointed from 21 December 1990)
Chairman: Mr. I. F. Hill—Company deputy chairman
Non-executives:
Professor D. Lloyd—Professor of paediatrics
Mr. J. C. Davies—Solicitor
Mrs. S. G. Adams—Personnel consultant
Ms H. Clark (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Lecturer
Mr. F. W. Taylor (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Chartered accountant

Wirral Hospital National Health Service Trust
(Appointed from 1 December 1992)
Chairman: Mr. A. H. Duncan—Quality co-ordinator
Non-executives:
Mr. B. Scott—Company director
Mr. A. W. Shone—Company chairman

(Appointed from 21 December 1990)
Mr. P. R. Johnson—Managing director
Mrs. M. Hazlett—Retired nursing sister
Mr. G. F. Appleton—Chartered accountant

St. Helens and Knowsley Hospital National Health Service Trust
Chairman: Mr. J. R. Higham (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Managing director
Non-executives:
Mr. J. W. Royle (appointed from 15 February 1993)—Surveyor
Mrs. J. L. Waitson (appointed from 18 December 1992)—Ex-Nursing officer
Mrs. A. Hughes (appointed from 21 December 1990)—Welfare worker
Miss A. Jones (appointed from 4 November 1992)—Solicitor
Mr. J. Spencer (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Supplies controller

Chester and Halton Community National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 21 December 1990
Chairman: Professor I. Stanley—Professor of medicine
Non-executives:
Mrs. J. Makinson—Bank nurse
Mrs. J. Fenton—Solicitor
Mr. I. Kemp—Chemist
Mrs. A. Elloy (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Social worker
Mrs. K. Tonge (appointed from 1 December 1992—Teacher

Mid Cheshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 21 December 1990
Chairman: Mr. R. F. Lawrence—Poultry farmer
Non executives:
Mr. W. Harding—Journalist
Mr. G. Fenn—Company director

(Appointed from 1 December 1992)
Mr. J. Smith—Company secretary
Mrs. P. Parton—Former nurse
Ms B. Ong—Senior lecturer

Cardio-Thoracic Centre—Liverpool National Health Service Trust
Chairman: Mr. H. Clarke (appointed from 21 December 1990)—Company chairman
Non-executives: (four only)
Mrs. S. Malthouse (appointed from 1 April 1993)—Solicitor
Mr. M. Rider (appointed from 21 December 1990)—Chartered accountant
Mrs. M. Downs (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Managing director
Mr. N. Tappin (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Retired businessman

Royal Liverpool University Hospital National Health Service Trust
Chairman: Mr. J. Fitzpatrick (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Solicitor
Non-executives:
Professor Sir Robert Shields (appointed from 1 December 1992)—Professor of surgery
Mr. E. Billington (appointed from 21 December 1990)—
Mr. D. Anslow (appointed from 21 December 1990)—Chartered accountant
Mr. G. Parker (appointed from 1 February 1992)—Managing director
Mrs. J. Newall (appointed from 1 February 1992)—School administrator

Countess of Chester Hospital National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 4 November 1992
Chairman: Mr. M. Emberton—Ex-company chairman
Non-executives:
Dr. G. Jones—Deputy college principal
Lord Wade of Chorlton—Farmer
Mr. N. Fitton—Chief executive
Miss M. Hargreaves—Personnel controller
Mrs. D. McConnell—Voluntary worker

Cheshire Community Healthcare National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 4 November 1992
Chairman: Mrs. Jane Hill—Retired physiotherapist
Non-executives:
Mr. S. Bartlett—Commercial manager
Mrs. R. Phillips—Magistrate
Mrs. V. Basford—Voluntary worker
Mrs. C. Bennett—Barrister
Mr. J. Kennerley

Halton General Hospital National Health Service Trust
Chairman: Mr. D. Hammond (appointed from 4 November 1992)—Company director
Non-executives:
Mr. R. Hodson (appointed from 6 May 1993)—Marketing manager
Dr. K. MacVicker (appointed from 4 November 1992)—Retired GP
Mrs. S. Anderson (appointed from 13 January 1993)—Personnel manager
Mr. M. Stewart (appointed from 1 April 1993)—Retired manager
Mr. D. Binns (appointed from 4 November 1992)—Retired general manager

East Cheshire National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 4 November 1992
Chairman: Mr. P. Hayes—Managing director
Non-executives:
Mr. A. Weir—Solicitor
Mrs. M. Loran—Publisher
Mr. S. Blenkinsop—Retired newspaper editor
Mr. D. Evans—Business manager
Mrs. M. Davenport—District councillor

Southport and Formby Community Health Services National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 4 November 1992
Chairman: Miss L. Brown—Barrister
Non-executives:
Mrs. C. Baker—Solicitor
Mrs. M. Jackson—Environmental consultant
Mrs. G. Gilbertson—Company secretary
Mr. T. Andrew—Banker
Mrs. B. Dean—Civil servant

Warrington Community National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 4 November 1992
Chairman: Mrs. J. Grundy—Deputy Lieutenant Merseyside
Non-executives:
Mrs. D. Lawson—Crossroads co-ordinator

Mr. M. Davies—Financial controller
Mr. P. Clarke—Company chairman
Mrs. K. Carey—Teacher
Mr. W. Cockroft—Ex-managing director

Warrington Acute Hospital National Health Service Trust
Appointed from 21 January 1993
Chairman: Mr. N. Banner—Solicitor
Non-executives:
Mr. P. Jeffrey—Chartered accountant
Ms J. Lang—Former sales executive
Ms C. Bingham—Teacher
Mrs. K. Cowell—Building Society Manager
Mr. J. Baldwin—Property agent

Hospices

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 24 May, *Official Report*, columns *447-48*, on hospice support, what information has been given to regional health authorities with regard to the methodology used in calculating the transfer from the Department of Social Security to hospices; and what advice was given to regional health authorities as to the methodology to be used in determining the distribution of that allocation within each region.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the allocation and use of the transfer from the Department of Social Security to regional health authorities in respect of hospices was given in executive letter EL(93)14, sent to all regional general managers on 19 February 1993. A copy is available in the Library.

HIV and Sexual Diseases

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is collected nationally to show *(a)* the number of people aged 65 years or over diagnosed as being infected with HIV and *(b)* the number of people aged 65 years or over found to have a sexually transmitted disease; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: Reports of HIV infections are made to the communicable disease surveillance centre and communicable disease (Scotland) unit.

To December 1992, 88 HIV-infected individuals had been reported aged 65 and over. Information on other sexually transmitted diseases is collected only for the age category 45 and over. In 1991, 3,290 genito-urinary medicine clinic attendees were in this age band.

NHS Equipment

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has of the value of NHS equipment purchased by voluntary local subscriptions in each of the last five years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* in constant 1993 prices.

Mr. Sackville: Information exactly as requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance her Department has issued to NHS trusts and district health authorities concerning the use by private patients of equipment purchased by voluntary local subscriptions.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with her counterparts in the European Community on the incidence of food poisoning; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The United Kingdom plays an active role in regular discussions which take place in the European Community on a wide range of public health issues, including food hygiene and safety.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *261*, what are the comparative figures for the incidence of food poisoning in each of the European Community countries for each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: There are no comparable figures available for other EC member states.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *261*, if she will make a statement on who is being consulted and asked for evidence in respect of the new Government surveillance programme into the sources and causes of human foodborne illness; and what opportunity members of the public are being given to contribute their views.

Mr. Sackville: The steering group on the microbiological safety of food is responsible to the United Kingdom Health and Agriculture Ministers for the microbiological surveillance of food. The remit of the steering group and its working groups covers the whole food chain from primary production to consumption, with external membership drawn from the Public Health Laboratory Service, the national health service, environmental health departments, food research organisations, the food industry, veterinary science and consumers.

A major study referred to in the previous answer is an epidemiological study of sources and causes of infectious intestinal disease in England. This study will take place in some 70 practices in the Medical Research Council's general practice research framework and will involve more than 20,000 volunteers. This study is one of a number of carefully designed surveys that will provide a better scientific basis for understanding human foodborne illness. Ministers are advised on the significance of these and other results by the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food.

I expect the first report of the steering group to be published later this year. Anyone who wishes to offer views about its activities is welcome to do so.

Pharmacists

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress her Department has made in negotiations with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee on pharmacists' remuneration.

Mr. Yeo: Discussions are continuing with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee. The next meeting is 15 June.

DEFENCE

Uniforms

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific steps are taken to ensure that overseas suppliers of service uniforms purchased by the armed forces are not in receipt of hidden subsidies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: It is our policy to encourage the development of a more open international market in defence goods through Government-to-Government negotiations, although it would not be practicable or cost-effective to investigate every potential supplier for hidden subsidies. Over 90 per cent. of my Department's contracts for clothing and textiles are placed with United Kingdom companies, though the nationality of sub-contractors is a matter for the company concerned.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the value of all contracts for the supply of service uniforms are currently placed with *(a)* British and *(b)* overseas suppliers.

Mr. Aitken: In financial year 1992-93, 91 per cent. of contracts for the supply of clothing for the armed forces were placed with British suppliers and 9 per cent. with overseas suppliers, including the EC. So far in the present financial year 1993-94, 97·6 per cent. of the value of all contracts for the supply of clothing for the armed forces has been placed with British suppliers and 2·4 per cent. with overseas suppliers, including the EC.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement indicating his Department's policy on the placing of contracts with overseas suppliers of service uniforms; and if he will make specific reference to the criteria by which value for money and strategic considerations are assessed.

Mr. Aitken: Over 90 per cent. of contracts for the supply of service clothing are let to British companies. Overseas suppliers could be invited to tender if they achieve admission to the defence contractors list or if they apply via the *Official Journal* of the EC bulletin. Orders are rarely placed with companies overseas.

Value for money from the defence budget is assessed through a system which includes contractor registration, quality assessment and the evaluation of offers with particular reference to price and delivery. Strategic considerations apply to only a small range of items, generally of a warlike nature, and are addressed through the selection of a limited number of companies which are to be invited to tender for the requirement.

International Military Services Ltd

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the shareholding in International Military Services Ltd. was transferred to Royal Ordnance; and how much Royal Ordnance paid for the International Military Services shareholding.

Mr. Aitken: All the shares in International Military Services Ltd. are owned by the Secretary of State for Defence. None has been transferred to Royal Ordnance.

Luchaire Defence SA

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, column *602*, what was the value of contracts placed by his Department with Luchaire Defence SA between 1983 and 1988.

Mr. Aitken: Comprehensive records for this period are no longer available. However, my Department is aware of only one, low-value, contract placed with Luchaire in the period 1983 to 1988.

Departmental Records

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 23 April to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), *Official Report*, column *241*, if he will give the reason for the absence of complete records of his Department's dealings with companies between 1983 and 1990.

Mr. Aitken: Our central on-line computer records will identify all contracts placed before but not completed by 31 March 1990, and all contracts placed since 1 April 1990. Central records of contracts placed since 1983 but completed by 31 March 1990 have been archived on to magnetic tape and are not available on-line. Identification and checking of the tapes could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) asked about one specific company; it was possible to identify one directorate within my Department which seemed most likely to have dealt with the company, and its detailed local records identified just one contract.

European Armaments Agency

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his French counterpart in regard to French plans to develop a European armaments agency within the Western European Union.

Mr. Aitken: None. The proposal to establish a European armaments agency is under consideration at official level with our partners in European armaments co-operation within the Western European Union.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Wadley) of 19 May, *Official Report*, column *232*, what was the cost of sending his departmental officials to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty preparatory committee meeting in New York; what proposals or papers were submitted by the United Kingdom to the meeting; and when and where the next NPT preparatory committee will be held.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Although the NPT preparatory committee meeting was concerned principally with organisational issues, the United Kingdom delegation reaffirmed our aim of securing the NPT's unconditional, indefinite extension in 1995 and our commitment to supporting continuing progress towards nuclear disarmament. The travel and subsistence cost of sending Ministry

of Defence officials to this meeting was some £4,000. The next NPT preparatory committee meeting will be held in New York from 17 to 21 January 1994.

Bomb Removal, Gower

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many bombs have been removed or rendered harmless on the beaches of north Gower by the Royal Navy during the last year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1992, 284 explosive devices were cleared from the north Gower marshes by the Royal Navy.

Overseas Trainees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from which military personnel have attended developmental and technical training courses in British military establishments since April 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The countries from which military personnel have attended developmental and technical training courses in British military establishments from April 1992 to April 1993 are as follows:

Australia
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Belize
Bermuda
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Burma
Canada
Chile
Cyprus
Czechoslovakia
Denmark
Egypt
Fiji
Finland
France
Gambia
Germany
Ghana
Gibraltar
Greece
Grenada
Guyana
Hong Kong
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Korea
Lebanon
Lithuania
Malta
Mauritius
Maldives
Malawi
Malaysia
Mexico
Morocco
Mozambique
Netherlands
Namibia
Nepal
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Paraguay
Peru
Phillipines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Saudia Arabia
Senegal
Seychelles
Singapore
Slovakia
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Christopher Nevis
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
Sudan
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
Uganda
USA
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Departmental Land and Buildings

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what quantity of *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings was owned by his Ministry in each region of the United Kingdom at the end of each year from 1987-88 to 1992-93; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much has been spent by his Ministry on leasing land in each region of the United Kingdom for each year from 1987-88 to 1992-93; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how much land has been leased by his Ministry in each region of the United Kingdom at the end of each year from 1987-88 to 1992-93; and if he will make a statement;

(4) how much money has been spent on purchasing *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings by his Ministry in each region of the United Kingdom from 1988-89 to 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member.

Correspondence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reply to the letter, dated 8 May, from Ms Lindis Percy; if he will place a copy of the letter from Ms Percy and his reply in the Library; and if he will make a statement on the substance of the correspondence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ms Percy will receive a reply within the next week and my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will ensure that the hon. Member is provided with a copy.

Forest Moor Base

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will detail the total cost of all works carried out at Forest Moor, in North Yorkshire, since March 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No major maintenance or new build has been carried out at Forest Moor since March 1990. Minor works and routine maintenance costs since then have been as follows:

	£
1990-91	345,000
1991-92	501,000
1992-93	620,000
Total	1,466,000

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role is performed by the Forest Moor naval communications base in North Yorkshire.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: HMS Forest Moor is the Royal Navy's major HF receiver station.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who owns the land upon which the Menwith Hill station in North Yorkshire is located; who occupies the station; who is responsible for the operation of the station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The land on which Menwith Hill station is located is owned by the Secretary of State for Defence, in right of the Crown. The site is made available to the United States Department of Defence and the station operates with the full knowledge and agreement of Her Majesty's Government.

Bosnia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column 86, if he will list the number of cases of United Nations military aircraft breaking the sound barrier over Bosnia-Herzegovina; what is the purpose of such practices; and what information he has on consequential damage to civilian property.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have no information about whether non-United Kingdom aircraft have broken the sound barrier over Bosnia-Herzegovina. If such a practice had occurred and was suspected of causing damage to property, it would be a matter for the UN and NATO.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Attorney-General how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

The Attorney-General: Since April 1989, 60 recommendations by the Select Committee on Home Affairs have been made in respect of the Crown prosecution service arising out of three separate reports. One recommendation, which was accepted, was made in the Select Committee's first report in the 1989-90 Session on racial attacks and harassment (HC 17). Fifty-one were made in the fourth report in the same session on the Crown prosecution service (HC 118). Of these, 30 have been accepted and 11 were concerned with matters already being addresed in other areas. The remaining eight recommendations were made in the report on domestic violence printed on 25 February 1993 (HC 245). The Government's response to these is currently being formulated.

No recommendations in this period have been made in respect of the other Departments for which I am responsible.

TRANSPORT

British Rail (Accountability)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport in what ways British Rail is accountable to Parliament; what limits he places on the scope and range of parliamentary questions about British Rail to which hon. Members will receive substantive answers; how this will change under this proposals for reform of the railways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The British Railways Board is accountable to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under the terms of the legislation applicable to the board.

It is for the House authorities to decide what questions are accepted for answer by Ministers, although there may be cases where questions approved for tabling are found on closer examination to be strictly operational matters for British Rail.

Under the Government's proposed reforms, the Secretary of State for Transport will retain substantial responsibilities on which he would continue to answer parliamentary questions.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects work to commence on the east London river crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Construction cannot begin until the current Court of Appeal hearings and the question of the EC infraction proceedings have been resolved. In the meantime, we are continuing with detailed design and other advance work.

Newham Flyover

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the likely timetable for the public inquiry and subsequent construction of the planned flyover at the intersection of Newham way and Prince Regents lane in the borough of Newham.

Mr. Norris: The public inquiries into the proposed flyover at the intersection of the A13, Newham Way, with the A117, Woolwich Manor way/High street south, and proposed underpass at the intersection of the A13 with the A112, Prince Regent lane, are planned to be held concurrently, starting in early September.

Subject to the availability of funds and the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures, advance works for the A117 scheme could start in the summer of 1994, and for the A112 scheme in autumn 1994. The main works for both schemes are scheduled for completion by mid-1997.

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 May, *Official Report*, column *158*, if he will set out *(a)* the total number of letters he has received on plutonium transport from (i) hon. Members of Parliament and Lords and (ii) others, *(b)* the categories of individuals or groups who constitute the others; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the standard letter of response sent to inquirers.

Mr. Norris: During this year my Department has received one such letter from a member of the House of Lords, 35 from Members of the House of Commons, and 30 from members of the public, local councils and other organisations, including the Highland regional council, Strathclyde regional council, Argyll and Bute district council, the Scottish Green party, the international secretariat committee of the Nuclear Policy and Information Unit of Nuclear Free Local Authorities, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. No standard letter of response was applicable to all the correspondence.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 18 May, *Official Report*, column *91*, what changes have been made in the text of the draft INF code in working paper 30; if he will list them; and when a final decision will be taken on implementing the code.

Mr. Norris: The draft code for the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel in flasks on board ships was changed to cover also the carriage of plutonium and high level radioactive waste. A further section (9), concerning management, training and shipboard emergency planning, was also added to the draft code.

Subject to the approval of the 62nd session of the Maritime Safety Committee and the views of the Marine Environment Protection Committee, it is expected that the code will be submitted for adoption as a code of practice by resolution of the 18th assembly of the International Maritime Organisation—25 October to 5 November 1993.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the future of his Department's executive agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: My plans are as follows:

(a) *DVOIT:* preparations for the privatisation of the agency are proceeding to timetable, with the aim of completing the sale by about the end of this year.

(b) *The Vehicle Inspectorate:* the consultation document issued last September said that standard setting and enforcement will continue to be provided by the agency. That remains my firm intention. I am grateful to all those who commented on the options described in the consultation document for the future provision of the testing of heavy goods vehicles and passenger carrying vehicles. I have carefully considered those views and have concluded that, in principle, VI's testing activities are suitable for transfer to the private sector, provided effective arrangements can be made to ensure that road safety standards are protected. The scope for this transfer is to be given further study. A copy of a letter to be sent to interested bodies about this has been placed in the Library; copies are available from my Department on request. I shall reach a final decision and announce it when the further studies have been completed.

(c) *Transport Research Laboratory:* I believe that the laboratory should be transferred to the private sector so as to enable TRL's managers and staff to compete more effectively for research work both here and abroad. I am appointing consultants to advise me on the options for privatisation and their feasibility.

(d) The *Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency*, *Driving Standards Agency* and the *Vehicle Certification Agency:* As my hon. Friend indicated on 20 November 1992, *Official Report*, columns *406-407*, we have been looking at the options for these agencies as part of the normal reviews of their framework documents. I have now concluded, on balance, that there should be no change in the status of DVLA at this stage.

In the case of the Driving Standards Agency, I am not satisfied that fair and uniform standards of testing could be secured if the work were contracted out, without disproportionate enforcement arrangements. The agency was awarded the charter mark last year and I want it—like DVLA—to concentrate on further measures to improve the quality and efficiency of its services.

The first priority for the Vehicle Certification Agency over the next few years is to ensure the smooth and effective adaptation to the new EC arrangements for whole vehicle-type approval. The options for privatisation and contracting out will, however, be reviewed again for all three agencies in three or four years time. Meanwhile, I have asked the chief executives to make full use of the market-testing initiative to secure best value for money.

Motorway Service Areas

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on signing service areas from roads upgraded to motorway standard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have today announced arrangements which will, in certain circumstances, allow temporary signing from newly upgraded roads of service facilities located off them. Copies of a press notice setting out the requirements a facility must meet in order to qualify for signing, and the circumstances in which signing will subsequently be removed, have been placed in the Library.

Operator Licences

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to reduce the burden imposed on passenger and goods vehicle operators by the present operator licensing system.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Government remain committed to minimising the regulatory burden on the goods and passenger transport operators, including that imposed by operator licensing. We are today issuing a consultation document with a number of proposals for simplifying operator licensing by removing unnecessary requirements. Copies have been placed in the Library. Subject to the views of consultees, we intend to seek early legislation to implement these measures.

Rail Lines (Vandalism)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 May, *Official Report*, columns *613-14*, if he will provide a table indicating the number of offences by sentence for vandalism on rail lines in each year; and if he will list the offences which received four-year sentences.

Mr. Freeman: The information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Night Flying

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what increase in the number of night-time flights from Heathrow and Gatwick he envisages in the event of the adoption of the proposals in his recently published "Review of Night Flying" at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted;

(2) what consequences will arise form his Department's new night noise quota system in terms of additional night-time aircraft movements at Heathrow and Gatwick.

Mr. Norris: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answers I gave to the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) on 9 February and 10 March 1993 in *Hansard*, volume 218, No. 120, column *583*, and volume 220, No. 140, column *567* respectively.

Traffic Forecasts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how figures for regeneration created traffic volumes are included in road construction assessments.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* The effects of regeneration on numbers of households, workers and jobs are taken into account by the Department in its estimates of future local traffic growth. The views of local authorities on these issues are sought from time to time, and incorporated in the Department's projections. Where regeneration is anticipated to have a substantial effect on the appraisal of a scheme, there are usually further discussions with local authorities, to enable the location and nature of regeneration created trips to be more precisely estimated and included in the assessment of the scheme. The forecast of total traffic growth in the area of a scheme is then controlled to be consistent with that area's traffic growth in the Department's national traffic forecast.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agriculture Council

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 24 and 25 May.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council from 24 to 27 May.

The Council reached agreement, subject to the adoption of legal texts, on agricultural prices and other measures for 1993-94, in so far as these had not already been settled as part of last year's reform of the common agricultural policy.

There was a difficult discussion on fixing the percentage requirement for non-rotational set-aside, to parallel the 15 per cent. rate for rotational set-aside fixed in last year's reform package. Given the important environmental advantages of non-rotational set-aside, I was determined to ensure that the figure should not be set at a level that made it unattractive to our farmers. For other member states, the Council adopted the figure of 20 per cent. proposed by the Commission. I secured agreement that the rate for the United Kingdom should be 18 per cent. for at least two years. Over this period, the effectiveness of non-rotational set-aside in the United Kingdom will be assessed to ensure that its impact on production is no less than expected; if it is less, the rate can be changed.

The Council agreed to an increase of some 25 per cent. in the rate of aid for set-aside land.

The cut in milk quotas provisionally agreed last year to take effect for 1993-94 has been deferred: it will be reconsidered next year in the light of the market situation. Instead, there will be an increase of 0·6 per cent. in national wholesale quotas for all member states except Spain, Greece and Italy. This is to meet particular needs, especially obligations arising from recent European Court judgments. In the negotations, I consistently argued that, since these obligations resulted fron the Court's reinterpretation of Community law, they should not be met by reducing the quotas of other producers, as the Commission originally proposed.

The Council confirmed increases in the milk quotas of Italy, Greece and Spain that had been provisionally agreed last year in the context of the reform package. It was made clear that these increases will only be continued beyond 1993-94 if the Council is satisfied that the countries concerned are complying with their undertakings to reduce production and implement the quota system in full.

The support price for butter will be reduced by 3 per cent. this year and 2 per cent. next. This will benefit consumers and is in line with the view which I strongly expressed in the Council that the Community's milk production should be regulated by price rather than by quota.

Earlier this month, the Commission unexpectedly threatened the future of export refunds on whisky and other grain-based spirits, which compensate for the higher price of Community-grown cereals. These are worth over £40 million per year to our industry. As part of the agreement reached in the Council, I secured agreement that the present arrangements will continue.

The Council agreed on a smaller reduction in the rate of aid for linseed production than the Commission had proposed. At the same time, linseed will be brought within the set-aside scheme from 1994-95 and not from the current year as the Commission originally envisaged. Since United Kingdom farmers account for over 60 per cent of Community linseed production, it was important to get these arrangements right. I believe they should avoid the replacement of this useful crop by additional grain production.

This outcome, particularly on the rate of non-rotational set-aside, the retention of whisky export refunds and the avoidance of milk quota cuts, made the Council an important achievement for the United Kingdom.

Sheep Premium

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to how many times force majeure provisions have been invoked by each EC country, in each of the last three years, in relation to applications for annual sheep premium.

Mr. Curry: I do not have the information.

Setaside Land

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much land of each agricultural grade in England and Wales is currently included in set-aside schemes; and what these figures are as a percentage of the total quantity of land of each of those grades.

Mr. Curry: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on BSE.

Mr. Soames: A progress report on BSE in the United Kingdom is being presented by the Ministry to the general assembly of the Office International des Epizooties this month. The report gives detailed information on BSE in the United Kingdom up to the end of April. The report points to the firm evidence that the ruminant feed ban is having the predicted effect on the course of the epidemic. The number of suspect cases being reported is now no higher than at the same time last year, and the number of cases occurring in young animals has fallen sharply. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Care Homes

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what weekly personal allowance single persons in residential care and nursing homes in Northern Ireland have a statutory right; and what checks have been made to establish whether this payment is made by proprietors;

(2) in what circumstances it is permissible for the proprietors of residential care and nursing homes in Northern Ireland to withhold payment in full of personal allowance to residents.

Mr. Hanley: For people in independent residential care and nursing homes with preserved rights, income support payments include an amount in respect of personal expenses which is at present £12·65 a week. In some cases residents contract for charges higher than the income support limits and may use the personal expenses allowance against these higher charges.

Residents placed by health and social services boards from April 1993 retain an equal amount for personal expenses from income support when their contribution towards the cost of their care is assessed.

Income support is normally paid direct to the claimant and the proprietor would not be involved in the payment of benefit unless appointed to act for the claimant where the person is unable to handle his own financial affairs and there is no other suitable person. The appointee can be changed if the social security office receives information which suggests that he is not fulfilling his duties. Case checks for claimants with appointees are carried out by visit every three years for those over pension age and every six months where an appointee is needed on a temporary basis.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statistics he has on the number of reported cases of food poisoning in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The information is as follows:

Year	*Total*
1988	302
1989	483
1990	819
1991	636
1992	916

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Mates *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The information is as follows:

Nature of complaint	*Date of complaint*	*Remedial action*
Disclosure of personal data	March 1992	None necessary. Investigation revealed no breach in principles
Subject access request not answered within 40 days	23 July 1992	Centralised subject access address now used to ensure future compliance

Jubilee Maternity Hospital

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many midwives train annually at the Jubilee maternity hospital; what percentage of all midwives trained in Northern Ireland this figure represents; and what proposals exist to replace this training capacity under the plans of the Eastern health and social services board for the closure of the facility.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 19 May 1993]:* The information is as follows:

Year	NI student intake	Jubilee placements	Per cent.
1992	85	24	28·2
1991	91	28	30·8
1990	102	33	32·4
1989	104	34	32·7
1988	111	36	32·4

The Eastern health and social services board has recently completed a consultation process on plans for acute hospital services, including obstetric services. My noble Friend Lord Arran is confident that there will continue to be sufficient placement opportunities for midwifery students in the Eastern board area.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of abattoirs in Northern Ireland and their combined average throughput in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1991 and *(e)* 1992; and what are the most recent figures available.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 26 May 1993]:* Annual statistics maintained by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland are given in the table. Data are not available in the form requested before 1975.

Year	Number of plants	Average annual throughput per plant (Livestock units)[1]
1975	22	38,096
1980	21	47,786
1990	23	42,105
1991	22	42,786
1992	20	48,216
1993[2]	19	10,978

[1] One livestock unit—one adult bovine/seven sheep/three pigs.
[2] At 31 March 1993.

Rationalisation Plans

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effect on the Province, and on rural areas in particular, of the independent rationalisation plans prepared by health boards; and what steps the DHSS (NI) will take to examine the implications of those plans.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 26 May 1993]:* The plans of health and social services boards are not independent, but are formulated within the framework of the Department of Health and Social Services regional strategy, which sets out the Department's objectives and priorities for a five year period. Boards' plans are expected to pursue these objectives and, in so doing, to improve the health and social welfare of the population of Northern Ireland. The regional strategy contains a new theme of targeting health and social need, which requires boards to identify those areas and groups, including those living in rural areas, with particular needs and to ensure that services are targeted as far as possible on them.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

National Weights and Measures Laboratory

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to privatise the national weights and measures laboratory.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 4 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *4*.

Mr. Moss: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what targets he has set the National Weights and Measures Laboratory for 1993-94.

Mr. Heseltine: I have set the National Weights and Measures Laboratory the following targets for 1993-94:
to operate within its current expenditure budget;
to achieve the specific objectives set out in its current Corporate Plan; and
to reduce the real unit cost of a programme-hour by 2 per cent.
The National Weights and Measures Laboratory is also required to meet a number of other targets, including quality of service targets. Its achievements against these last year will appear in its annual report 1992-93, which is due for publication shortly.

In addition, I have set the chief executive of the agency the targets of replying to letters from Members of Parliament delegated to him for replying within 10 working days; and producing auditable commercial-style accounts for the agency for 1993-94.

Environmental Organisations

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what involvements his Department's affiliated laboratories have in the European network of environmental organisations.

Mr. Heseltine: Warren Spring Laboratory is a founding member of the European Network of Environmental Research Organisations and plays an active part in its affairs.

Warren Spring Laboratory

Mr. Robathan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to maintain the knowledge and expertise in wastes management and recycling developed by Warren Spring Laboratory after the sale of its site in Stevenage.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology gave to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 21 May, *Official Report*, column *345*. I hope to make a further statement about the future of Warren Spring Laboratory in the near future.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

Mr. Heseltine: In the 14 reports published by the Trade and Industry Select Committee since April 1989, to which

the Government have responded, 210 recommendations were made, of which 154 have been accepted in whole or in part by the Government, or noted where no further action by Government was sought.

In addition, the former Energy Select Committee published 24 reports from April 1989 to March 1992. Copies of the responses made by the Government are available in the Library of the House.

"The Observer"

Mr. Moss: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the proposed sale of *The Observer*.

Mr. Heseltine: I announced on 14 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *599*, that I had received an application for my consent to the transfer of *The Observer* newspaper to Guardian Newspapers Ltd., a subsidiary of The Guardian and Manchester Evening News plc. My consent is required under section 58(1) of the Fair Trading Act 1973. I may give my consent to a newspaper transfer without a report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission where I am satisfied the newspaper concerned in the transfer is not economic as a going concern and as a separate newspaper, and that, if the paper is to continue, the case is one of urgency. In this case, I am so satisfied and have today given my consent in accordance with section 58(3)(a) of the Act.

Regional Development Grants

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many *(a)* objective 1, *(b)* objective 2 and *(c)* objective 3 areas there are within the European Community; and if he will list them, with the date when such status was granted in each case.

Mr. Sainsbury: *(a)* I refer the hon. Member to the list of objective 1 regions annexed to Council regulation (EEC) 2052/88. There are 24 such regions at present. *(b)* I refer the hon. Member to the *Official Journal* of 25 April 1989—No. L 206/26—and of 4 August 1990—No. L 112/19—which listed the objective 2 regions in full. There are 137 NUTS III level areas in the Community which are at present designated in whole or in part of objective 2 status. *(c)* objective 3 measures are available throughout the Community.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the applicants for objective 1 status within the European Community.

Mr. Sainsbury: There is no formal application system for objective 1 status. For the period 1994 to 1999 the Commission have proposed adding the following regions to the current objective 1 list: the east German lander and east Berlin; Cantabria in Spain; the Scottish highlands and islands; Merseyside, and Hainaut in Belgium. The Government are also making the case for Devon and Cornwall, rural Wales and South Yorkshire to be designated for objective 1. Other cases have been put for Abruzzi in Italy, Flevoland in the Netherlands and part of France.

Brewery Industry

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what changes he is planning to generate more competition in the brewery industry.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade made clear in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) on 19 January, *Official Report*, column *159-60*, and in his evidence to the Agriculture Select Committee—inquiry into the effect of the Beer Orders—it is desirable that the brewing industry should have a period of regulatory stability. It was for this reason that my right hon. Friend decided not to ask the Director General of Fair Trading—DGFT—to undertake a full-scale review of the effects of the Beer Orders, although the DGFT will continue to monitor the market and will investigate any evidence of anti-competitive behaviour in line with his statutory duties. There are, therefore, no specific plans to initiate further changes to the structure in the brewing industry or in the vertical arrangements as now regulated by the Beer Orders.

Coal Industry

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he will take to ensure that British Coal maintains all pits at full operational levels until *(a)* closure decisions have been reached and *(b)* the pit has been offered for sale or lease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal has given repeated assurances to myself and my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade that the fabric of collieries that it expects to offer to the private sector will be maintained both before closure decisions are taken and during the sale negotiations.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will instruct British Coal to offer all pits threatened with closure for sale or lease.

Mr. Eggar: British Coal has given a commitment to offer all pits that it decides it no longer wishes to operate to the private sector.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if British pits, offered for sale or lease, will be offered with plant and infrastructure existing at the time of the decision by British Coal to cease operations at the colliery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The sale and leasing of pits and the deployment of machinery is a matter for British Coal which will want to have regard to the needs of its continuing collieries and its overall duty to manage their assets in the most effective manner. British Coal has, of course, committed itself to giving private sector operators a genuine opportunity to take on pits that it no longer wishes to operate.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to monitor redundancy arrangements conducted by British Coal in respect of their effect on independent reviews of threatened collieries.

Mr. Eggar: The detailed terms and operation of British Coal's redundancy scheme are a matter for the corporation.

Mr. Couchman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about British Coal's plans to offer closing pits to the private sector.

Mr. Heseltine: British Coal has announced today that it is advertising four pits, Cotgrave, Silverhill, Easington and Bolsover, for disposal to the private sector.

In the White Paper "The Prospects for Coal", Cm. 2235, the Government welcomed British Coal's commitment to offer to the private sector pits that British Coal does not itself wish to keep in production. I understand that British Coal has confirmed its intention to place further advertisements for all other pits in this category during the next few weeks.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what predictions he has for *(a)* British Coal, *(b)* National Power and *(c)* PowerGen, of future market share as suppliers of coal to British industry; and what predictions he has for proportion of imported coal for each company, to the year 2000.

Mr. Eggar: Estimates of the supply of coal by British Coal to industry were included in the report on "Markets for Coal" by Caminus Energy which was produced as part of my Department's coal review. A copy of this report is available in the Library of the House.

Cloth Imports (Korea)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has made to the Government of Korea not to impose an additional duty on imported worsted and woollen cloth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 27 April 1993]:* I expressed the Government's strong concern about proposed increases in import tariffs on textiles when I met Korean Ministers during my recent visit to Korea.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mortgage Interest

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 17 May, *Official Report*, column *74*, if he will update the figures to take account of the 1992 annual statistical inquiry.

Mr. Burt: The latest estimate is in the table.

1992	*Number*
Cases with full mortgage interest included in the assessment	435,000
Cases with half mortgage interest included in the assessment	64,000
Total cases with mortgage interest included in the assessment	499,000

Source: Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiry May 1992.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Photo-identity Cards

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessments he has made of the savings offered by photo-identity cards utilising smart card technology to reduce social security errors and fraud.

Miss Widdecombe: We have held preliminary discussions with Post Office Counters Ltd. about some potential proposals which it is considering to improve efficiency of payment of benefit through post offices and which would involve smart cards.

Contracting Out

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *298*, which local authorities have contracted out aspects of their benefit administration; and which are considering doing so.

Mr. Burt: East Cambridgeshire district council and the London borough of Bromley have contracted out all aspects of their housing benefit and council tax administration which are permissible in current legislation; the district councils of Rutland and Mendip are in the process of doing so. No other authorities have yet come forward in response to the Department's request to notify us of positive intentions in this area.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated amount to be spent in 1993-94 in rent and other associated costs for the offices of his Department in John Adam street, London.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated expenditure in this Department for our accommodation at the Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam street, London in 1993-94 is £8·5 million. This figure is composed of rent and maintenance charges paid to Property Holdings and of a contribution in lieu of rates paid to the Crown property unit. This includes some additional space acquired in late 1992 which has helped to implement a major rationalisation programme which has enabled six other buildings to be released from the Government estate.

Severe Hardship Claims

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many severe hardship claims were made and grants awarded in the South Durham district in each quarter since April 1991;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *540-41*, if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures for severe hardship cases.

Mr. Burt: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 26 May 1993:

As Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency it is my responsibility to answer questions about relevant operational matters. I am therefore replying to your recent Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking how many severe hardship claims were made and grants awarded in the South Durham district in each quarter since April 1991; and pursuant to his Answer of 13th May, *Official Report*, columns 540-1, if he will provide a regional breakdown of the figures for severe hardship cases.

The information about severe hardship claims in South Durham is at Annex A. At Annex B I have appended a regional breakdown of successful and unsuccessful claims on a quarterly basis between January 1990 and March 1993.

This information has been obtained from the Severe Hardship Claims Unit. It should be noted that statistics relate to the number of claims made and may not equate to the number of customers.

I hope you find this reply helpful. A copy will appear in the *Official Report*. A copy will also be placed in the Library.

Severe hardship applications—South Durham District

Period	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
1991			
April to June	39	15	54
July to September	62	14	76
October to December	73	13	76
1992			
January to March	102	29	131
April to June	84	26	110
July to September	108	43	151
October to December	84	33	117
1993			
January to March	103	37	140

Annex B

Severe Hardship Claims: North East

Period	Awarded	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	982	447	1,429
April to June	956	378	1,334
July to September	1,164	408	1,572
October to December	955	313	1,268
1991			
January to March	1,556	539	2,095
April to June	1,684	470	2,154
July to September	2,306	613	2,919
October to December	2,153	536	2,689
1992			
January to March	3,197	751	3,948
April to June	3,102	816	3,918
July to September	3,577	819	4,396
October to December	3,033	878	3,911
1993			
January to March	4,755	984	5,739

Severe Hardship Claims: Scotland

Period	Awarded	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	1,475	543	2,018
April to June	1,552	547	2,099
July to September	1,640	570	2,210
October to December	1,307	363	1,670
1991			
January to March	2,315	644	2,959
April to June	2,826	655	3,481
July to September	3,005	767	3,772
October to December	2,737	592	3,329
1992			
January to March	4,086	839	4,925
April to June	4,943	1,107	6,050
July to September	4,919	1,196	6,115
October to December	4,412	1,293	5,705
1993			
January to March	6,079	1,410	7,489

Severe hardship claims: North West

Period	Awarded	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	508	303	811
April to June	563	273	836
July to September	732	285	1,017
October to December	588	173	761
1991			
January to March	987	345	1,332
April to June	1,180	314	1,494
July to September	1,537	432	1,969
October to December	1,476	371	1,847
1992			
January to March	2,642	539	3,181
April to June	2,905	574	3,479
July to September	3,312	666	3,978
October to December	2,835	753	3,588
1993			
January to March	4,571	917	5,488

Severe hardship claims: Midlands

Period	Awarded	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	466	270	736
April to June	456	254	710
July to September	559	276	835
October to December	398	164	562
1991			
January to March	787	296	1,083
April to June	1,000	293	1,293
July to September	1,637	429	2,066
October to December	1,576	400	1,976
1992			
January to March	2,735	547	3,282
April to June	2,693	614	3,307
July to September	3,138	683	3,821
October to December	2,593	680	3,273
1993			
January to March	4,126	887	5,013

Severe hardship claims: Wales and South West

Period	Awarded	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	354	194	548
April to June	292	168	460
July to September	435	192	627
October to December	387	113	500
1991			
January to March	827	256	1,083
April to June	1,128	245	1,373
July to September	1,655	369	2,024
October to December	1,586	323	1,909
1992			
January to March	2,477	424	2,901
April to June	2,542	489	3,031
July to September	2,833	572	3,405
October to December	2,423	539	2,962
1993			
January to March	3,960	723	4,683

Severe hardship claims—London (South)

Period	Awarded	Refuses	Total
1990			
January to March	359	179	538
April to June	364	125	489

Period	Awarded	Refuses	Total
July to September	481	187	668
October to December	355	145	500
1991			
January to March	760	288	1,048
April to June	1,014	228	1,242
July to September	1,499	335	1,834
October to December	1,419	315	1,734
1992			
January to March	2,371	433	2,804
April to June	2,247	516	2,763
July to September	2,668	559	3,227
October to December	2,286	542	2,828
1993			
January to March	3,687	618	4,305

Severe Hardship Claims—London (North)

Period	Award	Refused	Total
1990			
January to March	350	207	557
April to June	345	193	538
July to September	483	238	721
October to December	389	148	537
1991			
January to March	818	281	1,099
April to June	964	293	1,257
July to September	1,380	303	1,683
October to December	1,325	254	1,579
1992			
January to March	2,136	359	2,459
April to June	2,272	420	2,692
July to September	2,627	525	3,152
October to December	2,329	505	2,834
1993			
January to March	3,657	557	4,214

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Vincent Square

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to ensure that all listed buildings in Vincent square are retained.

Mr. Baldry: Government policy is that listed buildings should be retained in London or elsewhere except where a strong case can be made for demolition.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Supply Disconnections

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Institution of Environmental Health Officers concerning water supply disconnections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Institution of Environment Health Officers originally wrote to my right hon. Friend in November 1992, about the level of disconnections of domestic water supplies for non-payment of water charges and calling for the ability of water companies to disconnect domestic customers to be ended. They have argued that they consider disconnection renders properties unfit for human habitation.

In my view, disconnection does not mean that the property is statutorily unfit, as a supply of water remains available and can be readily restored. Both the Government and the Director of General and Water Services see disconnection as a matter of last resort for those customers who can pay but choose not to do so. It is right that customers should pay their bills, but also that where they are having difficulty, companies should ease matters for them so far as possible, for example, by enabling them to pay by frequent instalments. The director general issued guidance to water companies in April 1991, with the aim of ensuring a consistent approach by the companies on those lines. He has recently issued a report on the companies' response to the guidelines and is pursuing, through the regional customer services committees, improvements to individual companies' procedures in the light of their responses.

The majority of premises disconnected have their supply restored within 48 hours. Generally, a customer may be disconnected only after the company has obtained a court judgment for unpaid charges.

Leasing Policies

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to extend the allowable lease term for the leasing of empty private sector dwellings by local authorities to a period of seven years.

Mr. Baldry: Local authorities are free to take out private sector leases for any period they choose. Last December, my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced an extension of the concession which allows local authorities to take out short-term housing leases without lessening their capacity for capital expenditure. The Department is examining the provisions which apply to arrangements for temporary accommodation, and how these are being used.

Upward-only Rent Reviews

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) of 31 March, *Official Report*, columns *293-94*, when he expects to introduce a consultation paper on upward-only rent reviews, confidentiality clauses and dispute resolution procedures in relation to new commercial leases.

Sir George Young: I am publishing a consultation paper today on upward-only rent reviews, confidentiality clauses and dispute resolution procedures in relation to new commercial leases, following my announcement on 31 March, *Official Report*, columns *293-94*, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason).

A copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. As I made clear in my earlier statement, the Government will carefully examine the responses before considering whether it is appropriate to legislate or take other action on any of these issues. They have no intention of legislating in any way that would alter the terms in existing contracts.

Fire Protection

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviromment what effort is being made to secure representation on the Department's fire advisory panel of members with special knowledge of passive fire protection.

Mr. Baldry: The Department does not try to secure representation of particular sectors of the fire protection industry on the fire advisory panel. We do, however, seek an appropriate balance of expertise.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviromment what account his Department has taken of the lessons of the terrorist attack on the New York trade centre, in respect of fire resistance periods required for this type of building under the Department's present England and Wales regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: From the evidence currently available, there seems to be little to be learnt about fire resistance periods which is likely to be relevant to Building Regulations in England and Wales from the trade centre attack.

Council Tax

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviromment how many proposals for changes in council tax banding have so far been made to valuation offices in each local authority area in England; and what proportion of households this represents.

Mr. Robin Squire: The latest date at which this information is available at billing authority level is 30 April. A table showing the number of proposals at that date in each area, and the proportion of dwellings this represents, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council tax appeals have been received for the latest date at which information is available.

Mr. Robin Squire: By 20 May, listing officers in England had received 441,854 proposals to amend council tax valuation lists.

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has as to *(a)* for each local authority, *(b)* for each region and *(c)* for England (i) the number of householders paying full council tax, (ii) the number of non-householders not directly paying council tax, (iii) the number of householders paying council tax partly rebated by council tax benefit and (iv) the number of householders paying council tax fully rebated by council tax benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The estimates requested are not available by region or by individual local authority. We estimate, however, for England, that 12·54 million dwellings are not subject to a discount, 2·65 million householders receive full council tax benefit and 1·76 million partial benefit, and 3·75 million dwellings benefit from a transitional reduction. We have no figures on the number of dwellings receiving a reduction in respect of special features for residents with disabilities. As many dwellings receive more than one type of reduction, and some may indeed receive all four, we cannot estimate overall how many dwellings do not pay full council tax. Information is not collected on the number of non-householders not directly paying council tax.

Glazing

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set up an inquiry into the appropriate standards of glass and glazing to take account of the performance of certain kinds of glazing when affected by bomb explosions.

Mr. Baldry: Investigations already in progress are intended to provide appropriate guidance and standards.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what improvement in the standards relating to glass and glazing have been implemented since April 1992.

Mr. Baldry: On 1 June 1992 a new requirement—part N—of the Building Regulations was brought into force. This introduced for the first time detailed provisions to improve the safety of glazing in buildings.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment is being carried out of the effect of the present standards of glazing in business premises following the recent bomb outrages in the City of London.

Mr. Baldry: The Department has brought forward the start of a collaborative research programme with relevant construction industry bodies to prepare a guide for the design of buildings to limit the damage from explosive attack. The project team is examining the damage in the City of London. The Department is in discussion with representatives of the window and glazing industry on the development of appropriate standards.

Building Materials

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evaluation of the relative strengths of building materials was made consequent to the recent bomb explosions in the City of London.

Mr. Baldry: The Department has examined the damage as part of its continuing programme of developing design guidance for use by the construction industry.

Black Country Development Corporation

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give for the Black Country development corporation the names of the chairman and board members, their occupations or professions and their level of allowances or remuneration payable.

Mr. Robin Squire: The board of the Black Country development corporation is comprised of:

Chairman—
Sir William Francis—Civil Engineer
Deputy—
Christopher Hawkins—former MP, Economist
Members—
Roger Carey—Executive Director, construction group
Bill Clarke—Local Authority Councillor
John Edwards—Local Authority Councillor
Roger Burman—Chairman, electronics group
Mike Bird—Local Authority Councillor
Ian Flanagan—Chartered Surveyor

Dr. Diana Green—Deputy Director, higher education
Michael Worley—JP, TEC Chairman
Hugh Ellis Rees—Former Regional Director in DOE
James Antill—Chairman, private sector

The chairman receives £25,230 for two days per week. The deputy chairman receives paid £17,185 and each board member £5,030.

Homelessness

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to extend the rough sleepers initiative to the outer London boroughs.

Mr. Baldry: None. Responsibility for people sleeping rough outside central London rests with local authorities.

Housing Association Rents

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, columns *360-61*, if he will publish figures showing the average increase in rents for housing association tenants with assured tenancies in the years 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is not available for all housing association tenants with assured tenancies.

The figures set out show the annual increases in average assured tenancy rents for new lettings made in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Average rents: assured tenancy new lettings
England

Year	*Annual increase Per cent.*
1990	+18
1991	+17
1992	+15

Source:
National Federation of Housing Associations CORE data base.

Urban Priority Areas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to conclude his review of urban priority areas.

Mr. Robin Squire: My Department is currently discussing with the local authority associations and other organisations how to use 1991 census data and other information in assessing urban needs. This consultation will in due course inform decisions on the targeting of resources to urban areas.

Coal

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the interim opencast planning guidelines will influence the output of opencast coal.

Mr. Baldry: Neither the planning system in general, nor the interim guidance which my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 25 March, set limits on or targets for coal production. Planning permissions for coal extraction depend upon the extent to which the inductry bring forward proposals which are acceptable in land use planning terms having regard to all material considerations, including the interim guidance.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to encourage local authorities to use British coal.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for local authorities to make their own decisions in purchasing goods and services, subject to the requirements of law and financial propriety. Authorities may not discriminate on the basis of the country of origin of supplies, since this would be contrary to part II of the Local Government Act 1988, the Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1991 and the treaty of Rome.

Mansfield Enterprise Zone

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what considerations and criteria will be used in deciding the area and boundaries for the recently announced enterprise zone in the Mansfield travel-to-work areas.

Mr. Robin Squire: These criteria have yet to be finalised.

Council House Sales

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost since its inception of advertising the council house right-to-buy scheme; what plans he has for a further advertising campaign; and what estimate he has made of the cost of such a campaign.

Mr. Baldry: A total of £4·5 million has been spent on seven publicity campaigns since the inception of the right to buy in 1980.

A further campaign in the autumn will publicise the introduction of the option to buy on rents-to-mortgages terms. Detailed costings are not yet available, but are likely to be similar to those of our most recent campaign, earlier this year, which cost about £1 million.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated amount to be spent in 1993-94 in rent and other associated costs with the offices of his Department in Marsham street, London.

Mr. Howard: No. 2 Marsham street is a Crown freehold building. Estimated expenditure by my Department for its accommodation within the building in 1993-94 is £12·8 million. This figure is composed of internal rent and maintenance charges payable to Property Holdings and a contribution in lieu of rates payable to the Crown Property Unit.

Tenants' Rights

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will respond to the consultation paper "Tenant Involvement and the Right to Manage"; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The consultation paper "Tenant Involvement and the Right to Manage" was issued in December 1992. Recipients were invited to submit responses by 26 February 1993. The Department received 99 by that date, with a further 42 arriving afterwards. Respondents broadly welcomed the Government's

proposals for increased tenant involvement through the process of compulsory competitive tendering for housing management and an expansion of tenant control through the new right to manage. The responses contained a number of helpful and constructive suggestions on detailed points, which will be taken into account when regulations and guidance are prepared.

A summary of respondents is as follows:

	Number
Local authorities	82
Tenants' organisations	28
Tenant management organisations	3
Section 16 funded advice agencies	6
Housing associations	4
Local authority associations	3
Others	15
	141

Copies of the responses are available for examination in the Department's library.

Countryside Commission

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish a management statement for the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Maclean: I have today issued a management statement to the Countryside Commission setting out the commission's role and responsibilities and the framework for its relationship with my Department. A copy of the statement will be placed in the Library of the House.

Government Initiatives, South-East

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of support given by his Department to urban development corporations, the urban programme, city challenge and other inner-city initiatives in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* the south-east, excluding Greater London, for each year since 1982-83, including estimates for 1992-93, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure, excluding local authority credit approvals/capital allocations.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* The table sets out total net spending by the Department of the Environment for each year since 1984-85, excluding housing, inner cities and all credit approvals/capital allocations. Comparable figures for spending before 1984-85, and a differentiation between current and capital spending before 1988-89, are not available. Information on the regional spread of this spending is also not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	Current	*Capital*	*Total*
1984-85	—	—	15,798
1985-86	—	—	16,901
1986-87	—	—	17,336
1987-88	—	—	18,357
1988-89	19,107	85	19,193
1989-90	20,264	131	20,946
1990-91	21,642	128	21,769
1991-92	28,432	131	28,564
1992-93[1]	31,389	138	31,527

[1] Estimated.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of support given by his Department to all initiatives other than housing and inner cities in *(a)* England, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* the south-east, excluding Greater London, for each year since 1982-83, including estimates for 1992-93, distinguishing between current and capital expenditure, excluding local authority credit approvals/capital allocations.

Mr. Redwood: The total amount of support given by my Department's urban group of programmes, year on year from 1982-83 to 1992-93 and excluding LA credit approvals/capital allocations, are as follows:

£ million outturn prices (rounded)

Programme		*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Urban development corporations	A	62	95	81	74	97	126	151	400	552	530	414
	B	41	63	59	54	65	83	116	256	333	249	156
	C	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Urban programme[1]	A	115	140	170	185	199	199	181	179	178	179	188
	B	42	36	43	39	35	39	40	32	34	37	37
	C	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
City challenge	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]37
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other inner cities[3]	A	61	75	83	83	83	99	106	105	137	143	180
	B	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	6	8	10
	C	0·3	0·1	0·1	0·4	0·7	0·5	0·4	0·1	0·2	0·2	0·5

A England.
B Greater London.
C South East (excluding London).
[1] Includes for 1984-85 onwards other Government Department's contributions to urban programme.
[2] Programme supported by £19 million per year from the Housing Corporation.
[3] Includes LA and non-LA derelict land grant; city grant; task forces and CATs.

The UP, UDC and city challenge programmes contain varying proportions of capital and current expenditure; detailed information on each could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what has been the average *(a)* local authority expenditure and *(b)* Government grant to local authorities per head of population in England, for the last three years for which figures are available;

(2) what has been *(a)* the expenditure and *(b)* the Government grant per head of population of (i) Cheltenham borough and (ii) Gloucestershire, for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 26 May 1993]:* Local authorities report the following:

Central Government grants and local authority expenditure[4]

	1990-91 £ per head	*1991-92 £ per head*	*1992-93 £ per head*
Cheltenham			
Grants to collection fund[1]	125	233	295
Grants to general fund[2]	39	26	26
Expenditure	91	120	118
Gloucestershire			
Grants to general fund[2]	55	60	66
Expenditure	571	621	666
England			
Grants[3]	314	437	489
Expenditure	755	842	899

[1] Revenue support grant, special grants inside AEF, community charge grant (1991-92). These grants also partially financed the precept made on the collection fund by Gloucestershire CC.

[2] Specific grants inside AEF. These grants support spending by all tiers of authority. As the two authorities do not cover the same functions, the specific grants are quite different in size and composition. Also includes additional grant for teachers' pay (Gloucestershire, 1992-93), and community charge benefit grant and community charge transitional relief/reduction scheme grant paid to Cheltenham.

[3] Revenue support grant, specific grants inside AEF, community charge grant (1991-92), special grants inside AEF, additional grant for teachers' pay (1992-93), community charge benefit grant and community charge transitional relief/reduction grant.

[4] Revenue expenditure to compare with TSS.

WALES

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the numbers and value of offers of *(a)* regional selective assistance and *(b)* regional enterprise grants in Wales in 1991-92 and 1992-93 and the forecast outturn for 1993-94; and if he will list (i) the number of applications, (ii) the associated project costs and (iii) the amount of grant paid.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is published annually in the Welsh Office departmental report, the Welsh Office appropriation accounts and the Industrial Development Act 1982 annual report. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

School Meals

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in Wales qualified for free school meals in 1992-93; and if he will also provide these figures as a percentage of the total school roll.

Sir Wyn Roberts: From provisional schools census data, 98,466 pupils in LEA-maintained schools in Wales were entitled to free meals at September 1992. This represented 20·6 per cent. of the total school roll.

Glass Recycling

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the volumes of glass collected for recycling in Wales in each year from 1989; and what percentage of collected glass was recycled in each year.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information supplied to the Welsh Office by the British Glass Manufacturers Confederation is as follows:

Tonnage of glass collected during the year[1]

Year	*Tonnage*
1989	2,539
1990	4,710
1991	7,231
1992	8,559

[1] Total of districts for which data are available. Excludes glass not collected by members of the bottle bank scheme.

All collected glass is recycled.

Mortgage Assistance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish figures indicating *(a)* the number of claimants for income support in respect of mortgage interest, *(b)* the average weekly payment and *(c)* the total annual payment in each year since 1988.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Figures for claimants of income support who have mortgage relief considered in their assessment are shown in the following table. Those for 1988 are not readily available. Deductions may be made to cover assumed contributions from non-dependants living in the household. The amounts quoted are those considered in the assessment rather than the amounts actually paid to claimants.

Income support for mortgage interest

	Year			
	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Total claimants (rounded to nearest thousand)[1]	22,000	26,000	27,000	34,000
Average weekly payment (£)[1]	19·23	23·58	34·80	33·67
Annual payment (£)	22,400,000	31,300,000	48,900,000	59,000,000

[1] At May.

Source: Income Support Statistics Annual Enquiries (Department of Social Security).

National Health Service Property

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all national health service properties and estates in Wales, indicating their value in each case; and if he has any plans for their future management.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I have placed a list of all national health service properties in Wales and their values, based on valuations completed in 1992, in the Library of the House.

I have no plans to change the existing day to day management arrangements for the national health service estate in Wales beyond those which flow from the establishment of national health service trusts. However, following wide consultation on proposals to strengthen the strategic management of the national health service estate my right hon. Friend has approved the establishment of a strategic estates unit, National Health Service Estates: Wales, to be located within the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Empty Homes

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the number of empty private homes in Wales and of how many of these are *(a)* repossessed empty houses, *(b)* empty unsold private homes currently on the market and *(c)* inherited private homes which remain empty.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It is estimated from the 1991 census of population that there were 56,400 vacant private sector household spaces in Wales. A household space is the accommodation available for a household and is defined in "1991 Census Definitions", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Information on the cause of vacancy is not available.

Temporary Accommodation

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total number of families living in temporary accommodation in each local authority area in Wales in each year since 1985.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information is available only for the number of households, rather than families living in temporary accommodation and is as follows:

Number of households accommodated temporarily on 31 December

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*
Aberconwy	5	9	12	9	0	10	13	14
Alyn and Deeside	32	17	17	26	28	41	47	56
Arfon	3	3	6	7	3	2	3	9
Blaenau Gwent	14	14	19	16	12	15	16	9
Brecknock	1	2	1	5	7	12	21	14
Cardiff	24	57	82	91	179	141	235	394
Carmarthen	8	0	6	11	16	4	10	6
Ceredigion	3	3	4	3	3	25	41	25
Colwyn	11	0	1	0	5	7	11	7
Cynon Valley	41	60	11	11	8	12	23	5
Delyn	8	7	35	25	18	27	46	34
Dinefwr	1	1	3	6	4	11	9	3
Dwyfor	5	0	2	2	2	0	1	1
Glyndwr	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Islwyn	19	5	0	10	14	18	18	21
Llanelli	18	10	9	6	25	31	32	21
Lliw Valley	34	50	40	22	30	35	64	28
Meirionnydd	1	2	3	1	7	12	5	6
Merthyr Tydfil	5	4	8	2	2	2	5	2
Monmouth	44	47	22	45	36	65	69	28
Montgomeryshire	0	3	6	4	8	8	12	10
Neath	19	13	26	9	20	25	20	16
Newport	87	67	86	106	141	236	253	81
Ogwr	2	3	5	10	8	15	20	26
Port Talbot	22	21	53	23	27	22	25	27
Preseli	1	10	17	16	12	16	13	16
Radnorshire	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	6
Rhondda	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	1
Rhuddlan	4	0	1	5	3	9	14	8
Rhymney Valley	1	14	64	5	17	72	20	14
South Pembrokeshire	3	3	4	8	10	12	11	6
Swansea	17	15	24	24	24	54	77	72
Taff-Ely	1	1	0	0	5	6	12	7
Torfaen	4	5	19	16	18	20	26	34
Vale of Glamorgan	23	45	71	117	133	26	21	6
Wrexham Maelor	0	0	0	11	5	14	20	17
Ynys Môn	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	2

Source:
Local authority returns.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children under the age of five years are resident or attend school in areas with drinking water with over 10 microgrammes of lead per litre.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on areas with drinking water with over 10 microgrammes of lead per litre is not available.

Diabetics

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current incidence of blindness among diabetics expressed as *(a)* the total number and *(b)* the percentage of all diabetics, in each health authority area in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Consultant Surgeons

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will collect centrally information from each hospital trust on the workload that each consultant surgeon is to carry under their contractual obligation to the trust.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: No. This is a matter for individual NHS trusts.

Business Start-up Programme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales the business start-up programme has helped since its inception in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Since its inception in 1991, the business start-up programme has helped more than 6,000 people in Wales.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of self-employed people in Wales for each year since 1979; what percentage of the work force they constituted in each year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The figures requested are given in the following table:

Civilian employment estimates

A-Region — *Wales*

Title: Self employment

Date of return (December)	*Persons*	*Per cent.*
1979	122,000	10·6
1980	117,000	10·8
1981	118,000	11·4
1982	123,000	12·1
1983	135,000	13·1
1984	145,000	13·9
1985	150,000	14·2
1986	151,000	14·2
1987	147,000	13·3
1988	168,000	14·4
1989	186,000	15·5
1990	179,000	15·0
1991	174,000	15·2
1992	158,000	14·2

Source: Employment Department via NOMIS.

Business Parks

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the business parks that have been established in Wales in each year since 1987; which counties they are in; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Comprehensive information is not held centrally. I understand, however, that since 1987 the following major sites, categorised as business parks, have been, or are being, established by the Welsh development agency and the Development Board for Rural Wales:

County	*Site*
Clwyd	St. Asaph
	Northop
	Warren Hall
Dyfed	Parc Teifi
Gwent	Langstone Park
	Imperial Park
	Cleppa Park
Gwynedd	Parc Menai
	Parc Eryri
Mid Glamorgan	Ynysyplwm
South Glamorgan	Cardiff Gate
West Glamorgan	Penllergaer
Powys	Broadaxe
	Wye Valley
	Woodlands

Exports

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of Welsh gross domestic product in 1992-93 resulted from exports to European countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is not available for Wales.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales the enterprise allowance scheme has helped since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The enterprise allowance scheme has helped 37,958 people in Wales since 1983. The scheme was replaced by the business start-up programme in April 1991.

Radon Gas

Mr. Jonathan Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Institution of Environmental Health Officers concerning the contamination of houses in Wales by radon gas.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Welsh Office officials have discussed radon in Wales with representatives of the Institute of Environmental Health Officers on a number of occasions.

Urban Waste Treatment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the areas in Wales proposed to him as candidate sensitive areas under the EC urban waste treatment directive by *(a)* Countryside Council for Wales and *(b)* the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In March 1993, the Welsh Office, together with the Department of the Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, published its response to the consultation exercise it carried out on the criteria and procedures for identifying sensitive areas under the urban waste water treatment directive. The National Rivers Authority has been asked to compile a list of candidate sensitive areas using these criteria. Although the Countryside Council for Wales has not made any proposals on the basis of the finalised criteria, it will be consulted about the NRA's list.

Small Businesses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the average pre-tax turnover, *(b)* the number of start-ups and *(c)* the number of people employed for small businesses in Wales in each year since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The tables give an indication of the distribution of turnover between units, grouped by size, in Wales. Information prior to 1989 is not readily available and the size bands published were changed in 1991.

New VAT registrations give an indication of the number of business start-ups for each year. Firms with a turnover of less than £1 million each year account for over 96 per cent. of the total.

Year	*Number of new VAT registrations*
1980	7,070
1981	7,122
1982	7,704
1983	8,044
1984	7,609
1985	7,264
1986	7,811
1987	8,682
1988	10,873
1989	10,916
1990	10,165
1991	8,408

Source: NOMIS.

Information on the numbers of employees employed in units of different size is available for 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991 from the size-band analyses of the Censuses of Employment and given in the following table.

Employees in employment in Wales, by size of unit.[1]

Thousands

September	*Size of unit (employees) 1-49*	*50-199*	*200 and over*
1984	356·1	189·4	319·5
1987	364·6	204·2	334·1
1989	413·4	209·8	343·9
1991	439·3	217·4	287·2

Source: Size-band analyses of Censuses of Employment, Employment Department (via NOMIS).

[1] Excluding agriculture.

Number of units, by turnover size

Year	*Size of unit: turnover £22,000-£100,000*[1]	*£101,000-£250,000*	*£251,000-£1,000,000*	*£1,001,000 and over*
1989	44,055	13,635	7,208	2,735
1990	44,762	14,820	8,127	3,070

Source: PA 1003 Size analyses of United Kingdom businesses, Business Monitor, Central Statistical Office.

[1] £23,000-£100,000 in 1990.

Number of units, by turnover size

Year	*Size of unit: turnover £1,000-£25,000*	*£26,000-£99,000*[1]	*£100,000-£249,000*	*£250,000-£999,000*	*£1,000,000 and over*
1991	n.a.	41,709	16,986	9,107	3,467
1992	16,008	36,130	17,223	9,430	3,486

Source: PA 1003 Size analyses of United Kingdom businesses, Business Monitor, Central Statistical Office.

[1] £24,000-£99,000 in 1991.

Farmers (EC Aid)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column *523-24*, what proportion of integrated administration and control system submissions by Welsh farmers included an estimate of forage areas on a field-by-field basis.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not available. Livestock producers who did not have access to maps which would have provided them with the precise details were given the option to submit estimates of field sizes. They were not, however, required to indicate whether the figures were derived from maps, otherwise computed or estimated.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation regarding the cost of the corporate relaunching and logo unveiling ceremony at the Mermaid theatre on 18 March.

Mr. David Hunt: None. Individual schemes within the approved marketing budget are a matter for the board of the Cardiff Bay development corporation, subject to the usual delegation arrangements with my Department.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *90*, when he now expects to be able to release an officer to undertake the quinquennial review of the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

Mr. David Hunt: An officer has now been released and began work on the review on 17 May.

Regional Aid

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the continuation of the eligibility of the Bridgend travel-to-work area for regional aid.

Mr. David Hunt: The representations received about the review of assisted areas, including those relating to the Bridgend travel-to-work-area, are currently being considered.

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to be able to announce whether Wales will continue to be treated as a separate region for available set-aside.

Mr. David Hunt: As soon as possible.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the continuing eligibility of the travel-to-work areas currently benefiting from regional aid.

Mr. David Hunt: The representations received about the review of assisted areas are currently being considered.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about representations he has received on the future shape of the regional aid map in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I have received numerous representations about the review of assisted areas. These representations are currently being considered.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discretion he enjoys in determining the number of livestock to be processed in low-throughput slaughterhouses.

Mr. David Hunt: The EC fresh meat directive contains arrangements for small slaughterhouses, which can benefit from a special list of structural requirements. Following discussions during December's Council of Agriculture Ministers, the Council agreed to increase the throughput limit for small slaughterhouses from 12 to 20 units per week until 31 December 1994. During this period, the Commission will review the implications of the meat hygiene directives for traditional small businesses. The Government will work closely with the Commission as it carries out this review.

Select Committee Recommendations

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Select Committee recommendations have been made about, and how many accepted by, his Department since April 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the "Sessional Information Digest", copies of which are available in the Library of the House. This lists Select Committee reports and provides reference numbers to my Department's responses where appropriate.

Strategic Planning Guidance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Assembly of Welsh Counties or with Welsh representatives of individual counties in relation to the strategic planning guidance exercise recently completed; what financial considerations governed the funding of the planning exercise; what information on the contents and findings will be made public; if he will place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1990, the Assembly of Welsh Counties—AWC—accepted my right hon. Friend's invitation to co-ordinate the strategic planning guidance in Wales exercise and to report the results of the work to him. The work has included an assessment of the existing strategic planning guidance that provides the framework for the preparation of development plans and identification of the main strategic planning issues likely to affect Wales in the next 10 to 15 years. The Department has kept closely in touch with the progress of the exercise and officials have attended the seminars arranged by the AWC to discuss the interim results. The management of the exercise, its scale, degree of consultation and the consequent financial considerations are a matter for the AWC. My right hon. Friend expects to receive the final report shortly and will consider fully what further action is necessary. I understand that the AWC will be making its report publicly available. I will ensure that a copy is placed in the Library of the House.

Cereals

Mr. Roger Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of his inquiries as to Welsh cereal yields.

Mr. David Hunt: I commissioned a study of the various cereal yields in Wales, on which I consulted the farming industry. I am now considering the findings of the study, taking into account the various representations made to me.

Prince of Wales Hospital, Rhydlafar

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with South Glamorgan health authority in relation to the proposed inquiry into the running of the orthopaedic department at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The health authority informed the Department that it was instituting an inquiry into certain aspects of the running of the orthopaedic department at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 24 May, *Official Report*, column *467*, on public appointments, if he will list *(a)* the deletions from the list of appointments he makes to public bodies which have arisen since 23 March and *(b)* the current vacancies among appointments which he makes.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is as follows, reflecting the position as at 7 May 1993.

(a) Deletions:

Appointee	Public body
Mr. D. M. Barling	Plant Variety and Seeds Tribunal (Cereals)
Mr. E. Rae Mr. I. Jones	Development Board for Rural Wales
Mr. G. C. Crimp Mr. T. G. R. Davies Councillor Mr. K. F. Powell	Sports Council for Wales
Mrs. A. Bowen Mr. Thomas Lloyd	Dyfed FHSA
Mr. R. N. Thomas	Gwynedd FHSA
Mrs. S. Wyn-Jones Dr. M. E. Buck	United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
Councillor Leon Smith	Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Mr. T. R. Baxter-Wright	Gwent Community NHS Trust
Mr. B. K. Shah	Mid Glamorgan FHSA
Mr. H. S. Martin	Clwyd North CHC
Mr. D. Moore	Ancient Monuments Board for Wales

In addition, the Welsh Committee for Drug Misuse and the Welsh Committee for Alcohol Misuse ceased functioning with effect from 31 March, 1993; each committee had 1 chair and 15 members.

(b) Vacancies

PUBLIC BODY

Agricultural Wages Committee and Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees:
Clwyd—1 Member
Dyfed—1 Member
Glamorgan—1 Member
Gwent—1 Member
Snowdonia National Park Committee—1 Member
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation—2 Members
Sports Council for Wales—1 Member
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust—1 Member
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust—1 Member
Gwent FHSA—1 Member
Gwynedd FHSA—1 Member
Mid Glamorgan FHSA—1 Member
Mid Glamorgan DHA—1 Member
Rhymney Valley CHC—1 Member
Pembrokeshire CHC—1 Member
Clwyd North CHC—1 Member
Cardiff CHC—1 Member
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting—1 Member
Land Authority for Wales—1 Member
Housing for Wales—1 Member
Welsh Development Agency—2 Members

Barry Neighbourhood Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the transfer of responsibility for the proposed Barry Neighbourhood hospital to the Llandough NHS trust; and what representations he received from South Glamorgan health authority in relation to this issue.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: It was concluded that the interests of patients from the Vale of Glamorgan would be best served by linking the proposed Barry Neighbourhood hospital to Llandough hospital NHS trust rather than to the community and mental health unit.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines he has issued to the Welsh NHS trusts in relation to the implications of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 for existing staff transferred from health authority employment to trust employment.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A guidance document "NHS Trusts: A Working Guide" was published by HMSO in October 1990. This makes it clear that in making arrangements for staff transfer, and undertaking consultation, health authorities should assume that the transfer of undertakings regulations and the European Commission directive on acquired rights apply. Also, all staff who transfer to trust employment retain their existing contracts and rights. Further guidance in the form of a circular "National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 —Staff Transfer Schemes" has been issued to the NHS in Wales which also refers to the protection of the rights of NHS employees on transfer to an NHS trust.

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will lift the requirement for local authorities in Wales to expose work to competitive tendering before and after local government reorganisation.

Mr. David Hunt: "Local Government in Wales: A Charter for the Future", Cm 2155, affirms the Government's commitment to compulsory competitive tendering—CCT—as a means of ensuring that local government services are efficient and give good value for money.

It also proposes special arrangements for CCT during the transition from the present structure of local government to the new unitary authorities. I have been considering the detail of those arrangements for work which is currently subject to CCT and have concluded that, generally, local authorities should not be required to submit to competition work which they propose to carry out between 1 April 1994 and 30 September 1996.

This period of exemption is intended to smooth the transition to the new authorities. They will be able to

examine the best way of organising their services and, where appropriate, put fresh arrangements in place before exposing work to competition. More importantly, they will be able to focus, in the time after their election, on the immediate requirement to establish reliable and effective service delivery arrangements. The proposed exemption would apply to CCT under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988, and would be given effect by secondary legislation under those Acts.

I have decided that there are nevertheless some circumstances in which competition should continue to be required. These are:

(i) construction contracts worth over £1 million. This would affect primarily the highways departments of county councils;

(ii) work carried out by authorities, such as community councils, to which the 1980 and 1988 Acts apply but which are not affected by the reorganisation.

None of these arrangements will affect contracts which the private sector in Wales has already won through CCT. The White Paper makes it clear that, where such contracts expire after the date of reorganisation, they will run for their full term and will be assigned to the appropriate unitary authorities. Detailed guidance on this, and on technical aspects of the transition as it affects direct service organisations, will be issued.

These arrangements would not prevent authorities from voluntarily submitting work to competitive tendering during the period of the exemption. Nor would they have any effect on competition requirements set by the European Community.

CCT will not be further extended in Wales until after reorganisation has taken place. The timetable will be discussed with the local authority associations and an announcement will be made in due course.

Tenants' Rights

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make an announcement on the responses received from within Wales to the consultation paper "Tenant Involvement and the Right to Manage".

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The consultation paper "Tenant Involvement and the Right to Manage" was issued for consultation in December 1992. Recipients were invited to submit responses by 26 February 1993. Seventeen were received by that date from local authorities and others in Wales, with a further four arriving afterwards. Respondents broadly welcomed the Government's proposals for increased tenant involvement and the expansion of tenant control through the new right to manage. The responses contained a number of helpful and constructive suggestions on detailed points, which will be taken into account when regulations and guidance are prepared.

A summary of respondents from within Wales is as follows:

	Number
Local Authorities	12
Local Authority Associations	1
Tenants' Organisations	6
Others	2
Total	21

Copies of the responses are available for examination in the Welsh Office Library.

Sheep Identification

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on sheep identification.

Mr. David Hunt: A directive on the identification and registration of animals—92/102—was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 27 November 1992. It lays down minimum Community requirements for the identification and registration of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. The objective is to set up a harmonised system which will enable animals to be traced back to their farm of origin, both for disease control purposes and for controlling payments made under the common agricultural policy. The national systems for sheep and goats do not have to be in place until January 1995. Agriculture Departments are discussing with industry organisations how these new requirements will be implemented so as to minimise the burden on the industry as a whole.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration Advisory Services

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to regulate the operation of unqualified immigration advisory services.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The Government have drawn the attention of those planning the new Immigration Appeals Advisory Service and of the Law Society to the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee that a register of responsible agencies should be established. Should such a list be drawn up, we would be ready to consider making it available to applicants. We have no plans ourselves to draw up a register, or otherwise to regulate advisory services of this kind.

Racial Attacks, Pendle

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many racial attacks were reported in Pendle for each year since 1979; and how many complaints were addressed to the Commission for Racial Equality by persons resident in Pendle in each year since 1979.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what restrictions are included in the contract for managing the Wolds prison and for transporting prisoners to prevent the contractor employing convicted criminals.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 26 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the restrictions in the contracts for the management of Wolds Remand Prison and transporting prisoners to prevent the contractor employing convicted criminals.

Under the terms of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, people who are to be employed as prisoner custody officers in a contracted out prison or on court escort work have to be certified by the Home Office. This means we have to be satisfied that they are fit and proper persons for such duties and have received training to a standard that we have approved. In addition to these statutory safeguards for custodial staff our standard contract also requires a contractor to provide details to us of all other personnel, including sub-contracted staff employed on a contract.

In practice, this means that all those working at Wolds Remand Prison; in the court escort service in the East Midlands and Humberside and on all future such contracts are subject to routine enquiries about their suitability to work with the prisoners in the same way as happens with staff employed by the Prison Service. These include a criminal record check, to identify any convictions which might render the applicant unsuitable. Decisions about suitability are made to the same standard as, and in accordance with, Prison Service practice.

Unit Fines

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Magistrates Association on the operation of the unit fines system since his statement of 13 May.

Mr. Jack: Since 13 May 1993, my right hon. and learned Friend has received no formal representations from the Magistrates Association, but Home Office officials met representatives of the association on 20 May to discuss options for replacing the current unit fine provisions.

Drugs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were serving prison sentences at the latest available date of over three years in prisons in England and Wales for drug offences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 26 May 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of men and women in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales serving sentences of over three years for drug offences.

The latest available provisional figures by offence and sentence length are for 31 March 1993 and cover around 80 per cent. of sentenced prison population. They show some 1,300 male and 200 female prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales recorded centrally as being sentenced to over three years for drug offences, excluding any where drugs offences were not the principal offence.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many confiscation orders were made under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 for each year from 1987; what was the total value of the assets ordered to be confiscated and the actual amount recovered by way of confiscation, in each of those years; and what percentage this represented of the total amount ordered to be confiscated in each year.

Mr. Jack: Information collected centrally is given in the tables. A direct comparison between the amount ordered to be confiscated and the amount realised cannot be made because these data are collected from two separate sources and cover calendar and financial years respectively.

Table A
Offenders ordered to pay confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 by amount 1987-1991
England and Wales

Year	Number of orders made	Total amount confiscated £
1987	203	1,177,000
1988	539	8,096,700
1989	802	7,851,900
1990	871	10,142,500
1991	1,005	6,501,500

Table B
Amount (£) recovered[1] by the Secretary of State in confiscation orders under the Drug Trafficking Offenders Act 1986 by financial year 1987-88 to 1991-92
England and Wales

Year	Amount recovered £
1987-88 / 1988-89	600,000
1989-90[2]	1,375,200
1990-91[2]	1,448,000
1991-92	5,384,500

[1] The information collected centrally is known to be incomplete as returns were not received from all petty sessional divisions.
[2] There was some confusion with the recording of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988 during these two years. In consequence it is considered that data has been under-recorded for the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 and over-recorded for the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the research report from Sheffield university, prepared for the Home Office, on the prevalence of drug use among young people; in what form it will be published; and whether the publication will be the full report or a summary.

Mr. Jack: The research findings will be published in full later this year, in book form.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving a prison sentence in prisons in England and Wales at the latest available date after having been convicted of sexual offences against children.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 26 May 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of men and women in custody for sexual offences against children.

The latest available provisional figures are for 31 March 1993. They show that about 210 male and 3 female prisoners were serving sentences in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for unlawful sexual intercourse with a female under 16 years of age or gross indecency with or indecent assault on a child. Other inmates will however be serving sentences for rape, buggery and other sexual offences and for murder involving a sexual assault. The statistics for these offences do not distinguish the age of the victim.

Segregated Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women, were segregated under rule 43 in prisons in England and Wales on 10 May.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 25 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of men and women segregated under Rule 43 on 10 May.

The following table shows the number of males and females (both adults and young persons) removed from association under Rule 43 of the Prison Rules and Rule 46 of the Young Offender Institution Rules, in Prison Service establishments in England and and Wales on 10 May.

	Rule 43/46 Own protection	*Rule 43/46 Good order and discipline*	*Total*
Males	1,391	272	1,663
Females	22	3	25
Total	1,413	275	1,688

The above table does not include inmates in designated vulnerable prisoner units where Rule 43 and Rule 46 restrictions do not apply.

Refugees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, what changes have been made in the last 24 months to the criteria applied to refugees with exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom when assessing whether or not they should be granted United Kingdom travel documents.

Mr. Charles Wardle: There has been no change in our policy during the last 24 months. Reinforcement of the asylum division has allowed closer consideration to be given, in accordance with that policy, to some applications where we believe it would be possible for a national passport to be obtained.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 28 April, *Official Report*, columns *445-46*, what criteria are applied to individuals from Sri Lanka on exceptional leave to remain when requesting travel documents.

Mr. Charles Wardle: All asylum applicants who are found not to be refugees but who are granted exceptional leave to remain may apply for Home Office travel documents if they are unable to obtain a national passport. As with other nationalities, applications from people from Sri Lanka are considered on their individual merits.

Glazing

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance has been given to businesses in the City of London on the best kinds of explosion-resistant replacement glazing since 24 April.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The City of London police, in conjunction with Government security advisers, has been advising businesses and institutions in the City on the available range of glazing options. This complements the advice which is available from specialists in the private sector.

Confessions

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the cases of those convicted on the evidence of confession alone, before the introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. and learned Friend is always ready to consider representations alleging wrongful conviction, whatever the nature of the evidence in the case, and to exercise his powers wherever it is appropriate to do so. He has, however, no plans to institute a general review of cases falling into the category described.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in the last convenient 12-month period he has overturned the recommendation of the adjudicator at the immigration appellate authority to exercise his discretion outside the immigration rules.

Mr. Charles Wardle: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. All recommendations made by adjudicators are, however, carefully considered in the light of the known facts.

Open Prisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details of the criteria used by the Prison Service when allocating prisoners to open rather than closed prisons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 26 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the criteria used by the Prison Service when allocating to open prisons.

Guidance to Prison Service establishments explains that all adult male prisoners (apart from those regarded by headquarters as requiring high security conditions, and life sentence prisoners, for whom separate allocation arrangements are made) should be regarded as probably suitable for an open prison unless they are sentenced to a term of over 12 months for any violent offence, are convicted of any but the most minor sexual offence, had previously served a sentence of over 12 months for such an offence and had not successfully remained for part of that sentence in an open prison, have current or previous convictions for minor or serious drugs offences, or have a recent history of escapes or absconds. Prisoners who come within these criteria, would be placed in a security category which would require them to be held in closed conditions. Having decided security categorisation, the local prison then must decide on the establishment to which the prisoner should be allocated. Allocation decisions take into account the need for security and control, the need to make best use of the Prison Service estate and the needs of the individual prisoner.

Separate guidance applies to male young offenders and female prisoners. But the approach is similar in that an assessment of risk is made on the basis of information on the current and any previous offences before deciding on the appropriate establishment to which the inmate should be allocated.

With the passage of time or changes in circumstances, many prisoners become less of a risk and less likely to try to escape. Some long term or life sentence prisoners may merit downgrading to a lower security category more than once. A prisoner who was originally allocated to a closed prison may therefore be reallocated to an open prison at a later stage in his or her sentence. I hope this has provided a helpful summary of the approach we take to allocation. But if you woulds like to have more information, I should be pleased to provide it.

Redbridge and Snaresbrook Courts

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* criminal and *(b)* motoring cases were brought to trial at Redbridge magistrates court and Snaresbrook Crown court for each quarter of 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993 to date.

Mr. Jack: Information for 1990 and 1991 is given in the table. Information for 1992 and 1993 is not yet available.

Number of defendants prosecuted at Redbridge magistrates court and number of defendants tried at Snaresbrook Crown court for "criminal"[1] and "motoring"[2] case by quarter, 1990 and 1991.

Year/ Quarter	Redbridge PSD		Snaresbrook CC	
	Criminal[1]	Motoring[2,3]	Criminal[1]	Motoring[2]
1990				
Q1	961	449	1,112	12
Q2	1,103	638	1,054	3
Q3	838	840	1,144	4
Q4	783	779	1,044	5
1991				
Q1	925	1,066	1,020	4
Q2	906	1,103	1,064	4
Q3	956	1,189	1,074	4
Q4	901	1,365	935	3

[1] Indictable and summary non-motoring offences.
[2] Summary motoring offences.
[3] Improvements in the data collection methods used by the Metropolitan police district (MPD) have led to an increase in the number recorded as sentenced for summary motoring offences of about 50 per cent. in the MPD area as a whole.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include four options on the range of alternatives to be presented to the Houses of Parliament on Sunday trading.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes. The Government's Bill to reform Sunday trading law will now contain an option based on proposals made by the Retailers for Shops Act Reform. This is in addition to total deregulation and the options based on the proposals of the Shopping Hours Reform Council and the Keep Sunday Special Campaign.

Prison Population

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which years he expects the prison population to exceed the certified normal accommodation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On the basis of projections of the prison population published on 30 March—Home Office Statistical Bulletin 6/93—the projected population would not exceed certified normal accommodation before the end of the decade. It is, however, not yet possible to make any conclusive assessment of the impact of changes to the Criminal Justice Bill *[Lords]* proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

European Constituencies

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress is being made by the Parliamentary Boundaries Commission towards alterations in European constituency boundaries in the light of the United Kingdom's future increased membership of the European Parliament.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We hope to make an announcement on this matter shortly.

Computerised Crime Information

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on his most recent evaluation of the effectiveness and cost of the computerised crime report information system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Charles Wardle: My right hon. and learned Friend receives regular reports on the progress of the crime reporting information system.

Prison Ships

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions his Department has had with the Bibby Line.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 26 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about discussions with the Bibby Line.

The Prison Service has had a number of discussions with representatives of the Bibby Line over the last 6 years or so.

Floating accommodation units are an option being considered to cope with surges of prison population. No final decision has been taken on the feasibility of this option.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration the Prison Service is giving to the use of ships for prisoners' accommodation; and in what circumstances ships might be used for prisoners.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 25 May 1993:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the use of ships for prisoner accommodation.

The Prison Service has for some time been developing contingency plans to cope with surges of prison population which exceed the available accommodation. If effective plans can be devolved, they will reduce the need to have recourse to police cells to hold excess population.

Floating accommodation units are one option which is being considered, though as yet no final decision has been taken on the feasibility of this option.

Police Authorities

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police authorities with which he has had discussions between taking his present office and 22 March.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In addition to my meetings with the Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire police authorities, my right hon. and learned Friend has visited Hertfordshire, Avon and Somerset, West Midlands, Thames Valley and Surrey police forces, when he also met representatives of their police authorities: and he has had meetings with delegations of police authority chairmen from the Association of County Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Queen Anne's Gate

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated amount to be spent in 1993-94 in rent and other associated costs with the offices of his Department in Queen Anne's Gate, London.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The estimated amount to be spent in 1993-94 on Home Office accommodation at Queen Anne's Gate is £21·9 million, comprising rent and value added tax, payable to Property Holdings, contribution in lieu of rates, maintenance and capital costs and the cost of fuel, utilities and telephones.

National Debate for Crime Prevention

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been appointed to the National Board for Crime Prevention.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The membership of the National Board for Crime Prevention is as follows:

Michael Jack MP, Minister of State, Home Office (Chairman)
Keith Ackroyd, Boots plc; British Retail Consortium
Peter Batchelor, Vauxhall Motors
Janet Paraskeva, National Youth Agency
Prof. Ken Pease, University of Manchester
Richard Penn, Chief Executive, Bradford MBC
Dr. John Rae, Portman Group
Helen Reeves, Victim Support
Nick Ross, Broadcaster
David Sieff, Marks and Spencer
John Stevens, Chief Constable, Northumbria
David Walton, Chief Probation Officer, Staffordshire

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what investigations his Department has been subject by the Data Protection Registrar in relation to a suspected breach of a data protection principle; if he will summarise the nature of each complaint and state when the complaint was made; and what remedial action was taken by his Department to ensure future compliance with the principle subject to the investigation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 21 May 1993]:* The Data Protection Registrar has recorded 10 complaints against the Home Office. The registrar does not have detailed records of these complaints available, but gives the following information:

Complaint type	*Number received*	*Date received*
Principle 4	1	27 January 1993
Principle 5	1	16 December 1991
Principle 7	6	12 November 1987
		25 February 1988
		12 June 1989
		28 September 1989
		5 November 1991
		15 March 1993
Section 5(1)	1	10 February 1990
Unauthorised disclosure	1	26 March 1992

The Home Office has central records of only four complaints:

1. Passport Agency: Principle 4
(Received in the Home Office 19 February 1993)

A complainant was asked for his marital status when renewing his passport, and held that this was excessive information for the purpose for which it was required. The registrar accepted that the Data Protection Act did not apply as the information was not held on a computer.

2. Prison Service: Principle 7
(Received in the Home Office 16 October 1989)

The complainant was an inmate of Lincoln Prison, and alleged that he had not been given access to a computer record containing personal data relating to him. The complainant was informed of the proper procedures for requesting access to his computer record, and the registrar concluded his investigation.

3. TV Licences: Principle 5
(Received in the Home Office 10 March 1988)

A complainant said that the initial of his first name shown on his TV licence was incorrect. The complainant's TV licence was amended to show his correct name, and the registrar concluded his investigation.

4. Prison Service: Principle 7
(Received in the Home Office 7 March 1988)

The complainant was an inmate of Durham prison, and alleged that a request for subject access to a computer record held on him at the prison had not been complied with. The complainant subsequently withdrew his claim to have made a subject access request, and the registrar closed his file.

Since 1987, every Home Office department has held detailed instructions on compliance with the requirements and principles of the Data Protection Act in general, and on subject access procedures specifically. None of the complaints made to date suggests that those procedures need any amendment. The procedures are, however, kept under review and will be updated as and when necessary.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were held in remand for *(a)* three to six months, *(b)* six to 12 months and *(c)* over 12 months in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 24 May 1993]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the director general of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 26 May 1993:

The Secretary of State has asked me to write to you directly in reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of prisoners held on remand for *(a)* 3 to 6 months, *(b)* 6 to 12 months and *(c)* over 12 months in each year since 1990.

I am sorry to tell you that information is only readily available up to 30 June 1992. To obtain any later information at this stage would involve checking a large number of cases with Prison Service establishments which could only be done at disproportionate cost. Please find enclosed a table showing the length of time held on remand for inmates on 30 June in the years 1990, 1991 and 1992. The information for 1990 and 1991 was taken from Tables 2.3 and 2.4 of "Prison statistics, England and Wales 1991" (Cm 1221) a copy of which is held in the library. The information for 30 June 1992 is provisional; final data will be published in the 1992 edition of "Prison statistics".

SCOTLAND

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the provision of in vitro fertilisation treatment; what is the current waiting list for this treatment; and what arrangements are in place to ensure that women in need of this treatment receive it at an appropriate stage of physical development and age.

Mr. Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch) on 10 March, *Official Report*, column *593-94*.

There are four centres currently offering in vitro fertilisation treatment in Scotland, at Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. Information on their waiting lists is not held centrally. It is for individual health boards to decide whether or not to provide or purchase these services.

Fire Service Benevolent Fund

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund in Scotland; what matters were discussed; when he next plans to meet them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I have not yet had the opportunity of meeting representatives of the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund in Scotland. Other commitments have regrettably prevented me from accepting invitations to the 50th anniversary commemorative service in Stirling and the fund's golden jubilee reception at the Guildhall, London to celebrate fifty years of charitable endeavour in support of retired and serving members of the United Kingdom fire services.

Horticulture (Therapeutic Treatment)

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the use and development of horticulture as a therapeutic treatment within the national health service in Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: The national health service has long understood the part that horticultural work can play in the treatment programmes of, for example, patients with a mental illness or learning difficulty. Decisions about its use and development are however a matter for NHS provider units based on identified clinical needs.

Food, Drinks and Confectionery

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the state of the food, drinks and confectionery industry in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Strathclyde.

Mr. Stewart: The most recent annual census of production data show gross value added (GVA) in the food, drink and tobacco industry in Scotland in 1990 was 70 per cent. higher than in 1980. GVA in the industry in Strathclyde rose by over 40 per cent. between 1983 and 1990.

The industry has of course been restructuring, but it remains a major employer. The last census of employment (September 1991) showed that there were 66,400 employees in the food, drink and tobacco industry in Scotland; around 25,600 were in Strathclyde.

I note that independent forecasters, whose projections are monitored regularly by the Scottish Office Industry Department, suggest that further output growth may, in general, be anticipated in the industry in the next few years.

Thread Industry

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of people employed in the thread industry in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Renfrew district in each year siuce 1975, showing the numbers that were (i) full-time or part-time, (ii) managerial, adminstrative and technical or manual and (iii) male and female; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: This data are not available in the precise form requested. Employment cannot be classified into full or part time; managerial, administrative, technical, manual; or male and female. In addition figures for Renfrew district are subject to disclosure restrictions under the Statistics of Trade Act 1947.

The table shows the total number or employees in the thread industry for Strathclyde and Scotland in each year since 1975. The thread industry in common with other

industries requires a favourable economic climate in which to prosper. The Government's policy of low interest rates and low inflation is helping to stimulate the Scottish economy. The thread industry can be expected to share in this process.

Number of Employees in the Thread Industry

	Strathclyde	Scotland
1975	4,306	6,335
1976	4,080	6,196
1977	4,219	6,218
1978	3,329	5,229
1979	3,239	4,901
1980	2,840	4,184
1981	2,164	3,522
1982	1,662	2,639
1983	1,385	2,339
1984	1,121	2,120
1985	1,019	1,974
1986	1,164	2,165
1987	1,195	2,299
1988	1,005	2,047
1989	1,036	2,088
1990	838	1,736
[1]1991	690	1,549

[1] Provisional.

Notes:

1. This data have been extracted from the Scottish register of employment which holds information on units with 11 or more employees.
2. The thread industry has been defined as standard industrial classification (SIC) 43211 and 43212; spinning and doubling in the cotton system.

Solicitor-General for Scotland

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are in place for the Solicitor-General for Scotland to be accountable to both Houses of Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The present Solicitor-General for Scotland is not a member of either House. When neither the Lord Advocate nor the Solicitor-General for Scotland is a member of this House, it is the practice for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to answer questions relating to their responsibilities.

It is open to a Select Committee of this House or the other place to invite the Solicitor-General for Scotland to give evidence to the Select Committee in relation to any matter falling within the orders of reference of the Committee. In particular, the Select Committee for Scottish Affairs in this House is empowered to consider the administration and expenditure of the Lord Advocate's Departments. I do not propose to make a statement.

Prison Service

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the organisation and management of the Scottish Prison Service; what arrangements are currently in place for compulsory competitive tendering within the service; if he has any plans to make any other service element subject to CCT; and if he has any plans to introduce any form of privatisation to the service.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Prison Service became an executive agency on 1 April 1993.

The Scottish Prison Service is currently market testing the maintenance and minor works projects at Barlinnie, Shotts, Edinburgh and Perth prisons—annual cost £3·7 million, 115 staff—and the storage and distribution service which operates from central stores—annual cost £800,000, 22 staff.

The Secretary of State is currently considering with the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service possibilities for further market testing and an announcement will be made in the summer.

Market testing might lead to contracting out, but there are no plans to privatise any part of the Scottish Prison Service.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the number of people employed in each industrial sector within Renfrew district in each year since 1974; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: Local authority district employment data are available in selected years, on a consistent basis from 1981. The table shows the number of people employed in each industrial sector within Renfrew district in that year and in 1984, 1987, 1989 and 1991. It can be seen that the economy of Renfrew has experienced the process of structural change, a common feature of many modern economies towards a more diversified structure.

Employment figures for Renfrew by SIC

Standard industrial classification	1981	1984	1987	1989	1991
0-1 Agriculture forestry and fishing/Energy and Water supply industries	1,600	1,500	1,400	1,100	1,000
2-4 Manufacturing	32,900	27,400	21,400	20,300	19,100
5 Construction	8,200	6,700	5,900	5,500	5,200
6 Distribution, hotels and catering; repairs	14,000	14,300	12,500	13,500	14,700
7 Transport and communication	5,500	5,000	6,800	7,700	7,600
8 Banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing	3,000	4,400	3,700	5,500	5,700
9 Other services	23,100	18,700	15,600	27,000	27,100

Notes:

1. *Source:* Department of Employment (NOMIS).
2. All figures rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures are for the 1981 local authority district of Renfrew.

Language Disorders

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children in Scotland have language disorders; and what provision exists in Scotland for children with language disorders.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the time of the 1991 schools census, some 1,719 children were recorded as having difficulties with language and communication. Education authorities in Scotland secure provision of a range of facilities for these children in mainstream schools and in special units.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the appropriate level of staffing and other provision for children with language and speech disorders and on the location of these provisions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is the responsibility of education authorities to provide adequate and efficient education for children, including those with special educational needs. It is, therefore, for authorities to decide the appropriate level and location of staffing and other provisions for children with speech and language disorders.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what language disorders are covered by the report for his Department by Her Majesty's inspector Mr. Gibson; and when he plans to publish the report.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current investigation into educational provision for language and communication disorders is being conducted by a small team of Her Majesty's inspectors of schools and covers the special provision made for children with both linguistic and non-linguistic disorders. The children concerned are those with disorders in phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of language, together with those with pervasive communication disorders such as autism. The investigation will be completed this autumn and a report published thereafter.

Judges (Training)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are taken to ensure that the training of judges, and those about to be elevated to the Bench, includes a course on the handling of sexual assault and rape cases.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has provided additional administrative and financial support in recent years to facilitate the development of training to meet the needs of the judiciary. The content of judicial training is a matter for the judiciary and comprehensive information is not available centrally on the training undertaken by individual judges.

Criminal Courts

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations and reports he has received during the past 12 months on the efficiency of criminal courts in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Opening the Scottish Grand Committee debate on crime on 25 March, my right hon. Friend announced that he had just received the first report of the groups which have been reviewing court programming under the chairmanship of Sheriff Principal Gordon Nicholson QC and Sheriff Graham Cox. The report will be published shortly for consultation on its recommendations. Copies of the report will be made available to Scottish Members of Parliament.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Argyll and Clyde health board on the subject of toxic shock syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend has received no representations from Argyll and Clyde health board on this subject.

Community Care Forums

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the development of community care forums throughout Scotland.

Mr. Stewart: To encourage the involvement of voluntary sector agencies in the preparation and implementation of community care plans, community care forums are developing in many areas. The scale, structure and funding of these vary in response to local conditions. My right hon. Friend welcomes these developments which enable the voluntary sector to participate more fully in the development of community care.

Youth Training

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of youth training places in Renfrewshire; how many eligible youths in the past two years have failed to obtain a place; how many have *(a)* been offered and *(b)* accepted other than first choice of training; what proportion this is of total trainees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The delivery of youth training in Renfrewshire is the responsibility of Scottish Enterprise through its contact with the relevant local enterprise company, Renfrewshire Enterprise. Scottish Enterprise has assured me that the Government's youth training guarantee is being met, and will continue to be met, within that area.

This assurance implies that no eligible young people who have applied for a youth training place have failed to receive offers of suitable places, which is the entitlement conferred by the guarantee, although there will at any time be current applicants awaiting identification of a suitable place. The vast majority of young people receive offers of training through the careers service who take a number of factors into account, including the young person's preference, the local labour market and the abilities and aptitudes of the young person. The role of careers officers is to use their expertise to offer suitable training, even in cases where this differs from the young person's first choice.

In the light of the obligation on local enterprise companies to ensure that offers of training places continue to be made to eligible young people for as long as they continue to seek a place and of the responsibility of the careers service to judge what constitutes a suitable offer of

training, the Scottish Office does not hold information about numbers of young people who choose not to take up any of the offers of youth training places which they receive or who are offered and accept places involving training which differs from their initial preference.

Forestry

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the silviculture and forestry industry in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Our forestry policies remain as stated in "Forestry Policy for Great Britain" published in September 1991, a copy of which is in the Library.

Economic Prospects

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the prospects for the economy of *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Renfrew District.

Mr. Stewart: The economic prospects for Scotland, like those for Strathclyde and Renfrew district, will depend on the competitiveness of its industry. The Government have ensured that many of the factors determining competitiveness, and hence economic growth, are now firmly in place: inflation is at its lowest rate for almost 30 years; United Kingdom interest rates are at their lowest level for 15 years, as well as being the lowest in the European Community; and unit labour costs in manufacturing are growing more slowly than those in Japan and Germany.

Economic forecasters monitored by the Scottish Office Industry Department predict that these factors, combined with the lower exchange rate, will result in positive economic growth in Scotland in 1993, with companies competing successfully in domestic and international markets. Indeed, Cambridge Econometics' recent forecast suggests that Scottish gross domestic product growth in 1993 will be 2·2 per cent. compared with 1·4 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole. Moreover, this positive rate of growth compares favourably with the negative rates predicted for some of the European economies.

Parents (Fines)

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many parents were fined in Scotland in each of the last 10 years for failing to send their children to school.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Party Conferences

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of security arrangements in relation to the Scottish *(a)* Conservative and *(b)* Labour party conferences in 1993; what proportion in each case was charged to the operational budgets of the respective police forces; what is the expected individual per capita cost to council tax payers in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand from the chief constables of Lothian and Borders police and Northern constabulary that the costs involved were £56,700 and £700, respectively. The level of resources provided for the policing of party conferences is an operational matter for the chief constable concerned to determine in the light of all the circumstances, including the threat assessment. Fifty-one per cent. of police costs are reimbursed by the Government in specific grant. The remaining 49 per cent. is funded by police authorities from the different sources of finance available to them; the authorities determine which sources of finance meet the cost of particular services.

Disability

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has an advisory committee on disability issues.

Mr. Stewart: No, but the Department is represented on a number of committees which consider disability issues.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those buildings used by his Department which *(a)* have and *(b)* do not have adequate access for people with mobility disabilities; what plans he has to improve each; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office currently uses 93 buildings, mainly offices. There is adequate access for people with mobility disabilities to 54 of these, which include all our major buildings. Access is less good at the other 39, which are mainly small premises. Action to improve access is taken as resources permit although the design of some older or smaller local offices makes that difficult. Plans are in hand to improve access to the offices in Elgin and Stornoway.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what duties, responsibilities and rights of inspection Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Scotland has over the new structure of further education colleges; what changes have been made in the role of HMI since 1 April; if any further changes are planned; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Her Majesty's inspectors' duties, responsibilities and rights of inspection in further education continue as before. Their main additional duty will be, in co-operation with the relevant administrative division, to advise my right hon. Friend on the corporate plans submitted by the FE colleges.

Genetic Fingerprinting

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce additional measures to increase the availability to police forces of genetic fingerprinting techniques and resources; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Police authorities determine what resources should be allocated to their forces. It is then for chief constables to decide how these resources should be deployed. Tayside and Strathclyde police laboratories already carry out DNA testing or "genetic fingerprinting" and Lothian and Borders police plan to introduce such a facility when their new laboratory opens in 1995-96. Scottish police forces also have access to the facilities provided by the Forensic Science Service in England and Wales and by the private sector.

Cancer Screening

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the competence of the cervical smear tests carried out in the Paisley catchment area in the last 20 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Stewart: The assessment of the competency of cervical smear tests is a matter for the clinicians responsible for such tests and for health boards. All laboratories participate in the national proficiency testing scheme.

The inquiry into the review of the smear test slides at Inverclyde royal hospital laboratory will be examining quality assessment arrangements.

Sports Centre Funding

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an official visit to the McMaster sports centre in the Johnstone west area of priority treatment to evaluate the contribution his Department made towards it from urban aid funding; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I welcome opportunities to see the benefits of the assistance provided by the Scottish Office through the urban programme. I would be delighted to visit the McMaster sports centre in Johnstone west when a suitable opportunity arises.

Electoral Expenditure

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the fees and expenses paid to *(a)* returning officers, *(b)* depute returning officers and *(c)* all other grades of polling and counting staff for each of the most recent (i) European, (ii) parliamentary, (iii) regional council and (iv) district council elections; if he will itemise the eligibility criteria for the payment of these fees and expenses; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information about local government election fees and expenses is a matter for local authorities individually and is not held centrally. As far as parliamentary and European elections are concerned, the rates of fees and expenses payable and eligibility criteria for payments to returning officers, their deputies and other elections staff are set out in the relevant fees and charges order. The statutory instruments in force at the last European and United Kingdom parliamentary elections were, respectively: SI 1989, No. 995, the European Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officers' Expenses) Regulations 1989, which came into force on 13 June 1989, and SI 1992, No. 717, the Returning Officers' Charges Order 1992, which came into force on 17 March 1992.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take capping action against any Scottish local authority this year.

Mr. Lang: No. All Scottish local authorities, with the exception of Clydebank district council and Shetland Islands council, have set budgets for 1993-94 at or below the expenditure limits implied by the provisional capping principles which I announced on 12 November 1992. I made it clear subsequently that I would not cap Clydebank district council if it set a standstill budget. The council has satisfied this requirement. Shetland Islands council which, given its special circumstances particularly as regards its oil-related special funds, will fund only a very small proportion of its planned expenditure from its council tax which, at taxpayer level, is the lowest in Scotland. In the circumstances, I do not propose to cap the council.

Overall, this is a very satisfactory outcome and again demonstrates the effectiveness of my capping powers in protecting local taxpayers from excessive spending by their councils. It is my intention to issue later this year provisional capping principles for 1994-95.

Woodlands

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *177*, if he will give the date on which the access agreement in respect of Steam Mills in Gloucestershire was signed; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 26 May 1993]:* The access agreement for Steam Mills in Gloucestershire was signed on 31 March 1992. I have arranged for a copy of the agreement to be placed in the Library.

Forestry

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining the Government's policy on the development of the Forestry Commission in the United Kingdom; and what plans he has for change in ownership of the forests.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 17 May 1993]:* The policies for forestry which my right hon. Friend and his fellow forestry Ministers intend to pursue remain as stated in "Forestry Policy for Great Britain" published in September 1991, a copy of which is in the Library.

The Forestry Commission plays a central role in the delivery of those policies, particularly through its support for and regulation of the private sector and the management of the forests owned by the Government.

However, forestry Ministers have established the Forestry Review Group to review:

the effectiveness of the current incentives for forestry investment, in accordance with the manifesto commitment, and

options for the ownership and management of Forestry Commission woodlands,

and to make proposals for changes which would improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the Government's forestry policy objectives, having regard to the Government's other economic and environmental policies.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those individuals and organisations who have so far made submissions to the inter-departmental working group on the Forestry Commission; and if he will publish those submissions.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 26 May 1993]:* Many individuals and organisations have written to

Ministers and Government Departments giving their views on issues connected with the work of the Forestry Review Group. However, they did not do so in the knowledge or expectation that their names or their submissions would be published and I therefore do not think it would be right to publish this information.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how much is spent by the Forestry Commission on conservation projects; and what is this figure as a proportion of turnover;

(2) if he will outline the work done by the Forestry Commission on current conservation projects.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 25 May 1993]:* The Forest Enterprise arm of the Forestry Commission, which manages the commission's forests, spends over £5 million each year on conservation projects, which is about 5 per cent. of its turnover. These projects include the management of 340 sites of special scientific interest and other areas of conservation value—including forest nature reserves—and of archaeological sites. They also include projects for particular species of flora and fauna. Examples are the construction of an insulated hibernaculum for bats in Yorkshire; providing nesting boxes for barn owls, goldeneye and many other birds; managing forests to provide better habitats for black grouse and capercaillie, to protect goshawks and other birds of prey, and to provide nesting sites for nightjars and red-backed shrikes; encouraging orchids in south Wales and south-west England; creating artificial islands for black-throated divers; making suitable rides and other open spaces to attract butterflies; protecting hen harriers in the highlands of Scotland; managing pinewoods in Culbin to protect the lichens; and providing basking areas for lizards and other reptiles in Northamptonshire.

In addition to direct expenditure on such conservation projects, the Forestry Commission also carries out a great deal of work to improve the conservation value of its forests as part of its normal forest management. This covers, for example, the management of ancient semi-natural woodlands and the protection and expansion of native pinewood areas in Scotland and of heathland in the New Forest and other parts of southern England. It also includes the restructuring of commission forests as they mature to increase their variety and conservation value. This is achieved by premature or delayed felling of the trees, widening the mixture of trees on replanting and leaving open areas. This can result in significant revenue forgone, none of which is included in the costs given above.

Credit Unions

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to promote the development of credit unions in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

The credit union movement in Scotland has continued to grow. At the end of 1991, the latest year for which full figures are available, returns to the Registry of Friendly Societies show that there were 66 credit unions in Scotland, compared to 57 at the end of 1990. They had aggregate assets of £7,866,000, compared to £5,051,000. This was the equivalent to nearly 34 per cent., compared to 30 per cent., of the total assets of the movement in Great Britain. Those 66 unions together had around 27,000 members, compared to 19,000 in 1990, representing 39 per cent., compared to 35 per cent., of the total in Great Britain.

The latest figures available for the current year indicate that the growth is continuing, with 76 Scottish unions now on the register.

Management Consultants

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 16 March to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), *Official Report*, columns *222-28*, if he will give *(a)* the names, *(b)* the purpose and *(c)* the gross amounts paid to management consultants used by the Scottish Office since he was appointed, not already listed in his answer: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 20 May 1993]:* Due to the quantity of information needed to answer this question, I will write to the hon. Member. Copies of my reply will be placed in the Library of the House.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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17th May, 1993—27th May, 1993

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A1
588w

A19
Road works 570w

A27
Worthing (20:05:93) 472-8

A36
Bypasses 571w

A102
3-4w

A470
Road works 470w, 553w

A494
Road works 170w

A550
Road accidents 482w
Road construction 481-3w
Road traffic 481w, 483w
Road traffic control 482w

AA
see Automobile Association

Abbott, Ms Diane
Debates etc.
Allitt, Beverley, Infanticide (18:05:93) 163-6
Drug abuse (18:05:93) 176
Racial attacks (21:05:93) 541-3, 546, 549
Questions
Inner city areas, Small businesses 610w

Abortion Clinics (Access) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
1R (19:05:93) 241-4

Absenteeism
Health service staff 257w

Abu Dhabi
Arms trade 510w
Ministers' visits abroad 487-8w

Access to buildings
Government buildings 734w
Scotland 734w

Access to countryside
Forests 584w, 736w

Access to Parliament
171w

Accidents
Level crossings 86w

Accounting
Grant maintained schools 246w
Llanelli Borough Council 311w

Acquittals
Scottish courts 499-500w

Acute beds
Scotland 36w

Adjudication officers
76-7w

Adjutant-General Corps
Relocation of employees 145, 346w

Administration of justice
Crime victims 13w

Advertising
Council house sales 702w
Educational assessment 23w
Foreign investment in UK 121w

Advisory Board for the Research Councils
(26:05:93) 923-37

Advisory bodies
Handicapped 734w
Members' interests 662w

Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs
Public appointments 504w, 576w

Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations
486-7w

Advisory Council on Science & Technology
(26:05:93) 923-37

Advisory services
BAOR 455w
Immigration 718w
Small businesses 549-51w

AEA Technology
see United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Aerials
Templeton Airfield 455w

Aerospace industry
Exports 117-8w
Government assistance 117w, 453w
Manpower 117w
Mergers 511w
USA 453w

Africa
Debts 109w
Overseas aid 18w, 376w

Age distribution
Children 194-6w

Agricultural & Food Research Council
(26:05:93) 923-37

Agricultural Development & Advisory Service
596-7

Agricultural land
Local government land 542w

Agricultural production
Cereals 714w

Agricultural subsidies
243-4w
Integrated administration & control system (18:05:93) 190-3

Agriculture
Civil service manpower 362-3w
EC advisory committees 542-3w
Environment protection 53w, 543-5w
Government grants 243-4w
Wales 53w, 470w, 544-5w

Agriculture Bill (HL) 1992/93
Questions
25w

Agri-environment action plan
543-4w
Wales 135w

Aid financed trade
Developing countries 751-2

AIDS
Disease control 257-8w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 258w
Health education 27w

Ainger, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 273-5, 280, 288
Questions
Armed forces, Development areas 143w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 135-6w
Migraine, Prescription drugs 152-3w
Nature conservation, Planning permission 551-2w
Nuclear safety 486w
Road works, Expenditure 49w
Templeton Airfield, Aerials 455w
Withybush Hospital, Building repairs 471-2w

Ainsworth, Mr Robert
Questions
Community action 746
Industrial policy 235

Air conditioning
Chlorofluorocarbons 527w

Air Europe
579-80w

Air fares
Belfast Airport 358-9

Air pollution
Carbon dioxide 286w
EC action 178w
Greater London 610w
Hay fever 28-9w

Air pollution control
EC action 177w
Ozone layer 357w, 919-20

Air routes
Cardiff Airport 555w
Heathrow Airport 90w

Air safety
Baggage allowances 1w

Air transport
Armed forces deployment 345w

Airports
Liverpool 225w

Aitken, Mr Jonathan, Minister of State for Defence Procurement
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 303-13, 331
Rosyth Dockyard, Nuclear safety (18:05:93) 215-22
Questions
Aerospace industry, Mergers 511w
Armed forces uniforms, Defence procurement 677w
Arms exports, Government assistance 146
Arms trade, Indonesia 146
Arms trade, Kuwait 140-1
Arms trade, Trade fairs 510w
AWE Aldermaston, Vacancies 80w
Consar, Defence contracts 230w
Defence contracts, Departmental records 678w
Defence procurement, Shipbuilding 142w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Mechanical metrology laboratory 263-5w
Deregulation initiative 148
Directorate General of Test & Evaluation, Civil service agencies 265-6w
Dockyards, Nuclear safety 509w
EH101 helicopters, Defence procurement 142w, 629w
European Armaments Agency 678w
European fighter aircraft, Defence procurement 139-40, 144
Helicopter carriers, Defence contracts 149, 627w
Helicopter carriers, Defence procurement 232w, 511w, 625-7w
Helicopter carriers, Marine engines 453-4w
Helicopters, Defence procurement 148-9
International Military Services, Government shareholding 677w
Luchaire Defence, Defence contracts 678w
Mines in the next century 629w
Ministry of Defence, Computer privacy 344w
Navy, Exhibitions 510-1w
Nuclear reactors, Decommissioning 344w
Nuclear submarines, Shipbuilding 509w
Procurement Executive, Offices 83w
Radiation hazards, Radiation protection 262w
ROF Birtley, Ammunition 80w
Rolls-Royce, Defence research 144w
SPEL, Defence contracts 230w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Defence procurement 145w
TASM 261w, 454w
Templeton Airfield, Aerials 455w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Defence contracts 627w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Defence procurement 626w

Alcan Aluminium UK Ltd (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 28

Alcoholism
Community care 330w

Aldermaston
Nuclear reactors 344w, 661w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Questions
Church buildings, Insurance 71-2w
Church Commissioners, Publications 13
Church property, Bombings 12
Church property, Rents 12-3
Clergy, Tied housing 71w
Selby bypass, Road construction 237w
Terrorism 12

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Human rights (27:05:93) 1024-30
Questions
Council of Europe, European Convention on Human Rights 370w
European Convention on Human Rights, Judgments 370w
European Court of Human Rights, Administrative delays 370-1w
Family income, Nottinghamshire 284w
Family income, Tax burden 284-5w
Illegal immigrants, Deportation 433w
Immigrant detainees, Deportation 433w
Immigrant detainees, Detention centres 434-5w
Immigrant detainees, Illegal immigrants 434w
Immigrant detainees, Political refugees 434w
Immigration appeals 69-70w, 316w
Parliamentary questions, Dept for Education 23w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Employment 130-1w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Health 30-1w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of National Heritage 123w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Social Security 77-8w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of the Environment 59w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Trade & Industry 343-4w
Parliamentary questions, Dept of Transport 3w
Parliamentary questions, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 48w
Parliamentary questions, Home Office 62-3w
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 25w
Parliamentary questions, Ministry of Defence 83-4w
Parliamentary questions, Prime Minister 34w
Parliamentary questions, Treasury 14w
Refugees, Travel requirements 435w, 721-2w
Refugees, Yugoslavia 435w
Taxation, Members' visits abroad 571w

Allitt, Beverley
Infanticide (18:05:93) 163-6, 669-70w
Inquiries 152-3, 669-70w

Allitt Inquiry
152-3, 669-70w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 255
Questions
Animal experiments, Genetics 216-7w
Arts festivals, Liverpool 177-8w
Broadgreen Hospital, Hospital closures 148w
China, Family planning 20-1w, 44w
China, Infanticide 44w
Dietary foods, Prescriptions 436-7w
Everyman Theatre Liverpool, Arts finance 125-6w
Genetic engineering 193w
Higher education colleges 105w
Human Fertilisation & Embryology Act 1990 192w
Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority, Finance 192w
International Planned Parenthood Federation, UK contributions 21w
Merseyside Development Corporation, Finance 614w

Alton, Mr David—continued
Merseyside Integrated Development Operation 620w
Petroleum exploration, Liverpool Bay 232-3
Railway electrification, Northern region 85w
Railway travel, Liverpool 89w
RU486, Family planning clinics 445w
World War II, Festivals & special occasions 230w

Alzheimer's disease
Disability living allowance 77w

Ambulance services
Argyll & Clyde Health Board 277-8w

Amess, Mr David
Questions
Nuclear weapons policy 146-7

Ammunition
Defence contracts 116w
ROF Birtley 80w

Ancram, Mr Michael
Questions
Wilton Park Executive Agency, Performance standards 254w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Intelligence services, Points of order (26:05:93) 941-2
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 936
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 957-8, 966, 973, 978, 980-2
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 577

Anderson, Ms Janet
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 282-3
Questions
Council tax 699-700w
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 297w, 455-7w

Angola
Political refugees 425w

Animal diseases
Notifiable diseases 593w

Animal experiments
Genetics 216-7w

Animal welfare
EC law 542w

Animals
Smuggling 418w

Annual reports
Historic Buildings Council for Wales 327-8w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 69w

Antarctic
157-8w

Arab boycott
228, 239-40

Arbitration schemes
156-7w, 233-4w, 567-8w

Arbuthnot, Mr James, An Assistant Whip
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 540

Argentina
Fishery agreements (17:05:93) 130

Argyll & Clyde Health Board
Ambulance services 277-8w
Property transfer 278w
Public appointments 277w

Armadale
Opencast mining 271w

Armed conflict
Bosnia-Herzegovina 44-5w, 345w, 514w, 516w, 571-80
Croatia 42-3w, 162-4w

Armed conflict—continued
Yugoslavia 162w, 252w, 517w

Armed forces
Asbestosis 84w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 261w
Development areas 143w
Electoral register (26:05:93) 942

Armed forces casualties
Army in Northern Ireland 625w
UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission 625w

Armed forces civilians
South West region 525-6w

Armed forces dependants
625w

Armed forces deployment
Air transport 345w
Belize 143w, 144-6
Bosnia-Herzegovina 140-1w, 150-1, 156, 345w
Croatia 164-5w, 511w
Falkland Islands 150
Peace keeping operations 149
Yugoslavia 144w

Armed forces housing
142w
RAF Biggin Hill 231w

Armed forces reserves
Defence review 142-3

Armed forces strength
Army 346w
NATO 454-6w
Russia 454-6w

Armed forces training
144w, 679-80w
Belize 229w

Armed forces uniforms
Croatia 344w
Defence procurement 677w

Armenia
514-5w

Arms control
Biological weapons 82w

Arms embargoes
Croatia 164w, 513-4w

Arms exports
Government assistance 146

Arms to Iraq Inquiry
750

Arms trade
Abu Dhabi 510w
Indonesia 146
Kuwait 140-1
Trade fairs 510-1w

Army
80w
Armed forces strength 346w
Scotland 149-50

Army in Northern Ireland
Armed forces casualties 625w

Army strength
BAOR 624w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 246-7
Members' speeches (18:05:93) 188
Railway network, Gravesham (18:05:93) 185-8
VAT (18:05:93) 179
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 569w
Export promotion 222w
Export promotion, Government assistance 237
Overseas aid, Democracy 570
Prosecutions 566

Arnold, Sir Thomas
Questions
Deregulation initiative, Civil service unions 240
European Parliament constituencies 567w

Arnold, Sir Thomas—continued
Fines 719w
Income support, Mortgages 72w, 693w
Oxford University, Fees & charges 332-3w
Road construction 564
THORP, Sellafield 486w

Arrests
Football 474w

Artificial insemination
Licensing 256w

Arts
244-5w

Arts Council
244-5w

Arts Council grants
17-8w

Arts festivals
Liverpool 177-8w

Arts finance
Drama 15-7w
Everyman Theatre Liverpool 125-6w

Asbestos
652-3w

Asbestosis
Armed forces 84w
Compensation 84w

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 298

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Questions
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 750
Post offices, Social security payments 153-4

Ashford
Railway stations 410w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
Questions
Business questions 372-3

Asian Development Bank
658-9w

Assembly of Welsh Counties
714w

Assisted areas
35-6w, 452w, 691w
Bridgend 713w
Cumbria 239
Greater London 367-8
London boroughs 287w
North Wales 741-2
Wakefield (25:05:93) 894-902
Wales 713w

Assisted places scheme
Parental contributions 272w, 602w
Scotland 272w

Association of County Councils
611w, 615w, 918
Environment protection 528w

Assured tenancies
Rent increases 701w

***Atkins, Mr Robert**, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Belfast Airport, Air fares 358-9
Building regulations, Northern Ireland 461-2w
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 296w
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 354-5
Fire prevention, Northern Ireland 460-1w
Fire regulations, Northern Ireland 462-3w
Hostels, Northern Ireland 462w
Northern Ireland Rate Collection Agency, Performance standards 326w
Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland, Performance standards 326w

Atkins, Mr Robert—continued
Ports, Privatisation 290w
Retail trade, Northern Ireland 356
Rural planning, Northern Ireland 290w
Shopping centres, Northern Ireland 355-6
Tourism, Northern Ireland 358-9
Tourism, Republic of Ireland 291w
Travel to interview scheme, Northern Ireland 461w, 597-8w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 359-60
Water pollution, EC law 290w

Atkinson, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 444-5
Questions
China, Human rights 516w
Hostels, Planning permission 57w
Mental Health Act 1983, Codes of practice 195w
Strategic defence initiative 147

Atkinson, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 299
Questions
Gas tariffs 490-1w
Hospital waiting lists, Northern Regional Health Authority 578w
Labour costs, Manufacturing industries 524w

Attendance allowance
Social security claims 298-306w

Attorney General
Civil service manpower 380w
Computer privacy 323w
Select Committee reports 681-2w

Auctions
Chevening House 122w

Audio equipment
Retail prices 110w

Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England & Wales
255w, 618w

Austin-Walker, Mr John
Debates etc.
Racial attacks (21:05:93) 543-4
Sports (17:05:93) 66
Questions
Air pollution, Greater London 610w
Assisted areas, London boroughs 287w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Mechanical metrology laboratory 263-5w
Directorate General of Test & Evaluation, Civil service agencies 265-6w
East London river crossing, Costs 571w
East London river crossing, Environmental impact assessment 90-1w
East London river crossing, Oxleas Wood 4w
Emergency planning, Government grants to local authorities 63-5w
Jubilee line 558-9
Kearney, Jeremiah, Death 32w
Northern Ireland government 289-90w
Railway network, East London 332w
Railway network, Greater London 416w
"Testing: The Facts" 168-9w

Autobiography
Clark, Alan 565-6
Former Ministers 566

Automated credit transfer
(18:05:93) 185-8, 228w, (19:05:93) 245-96, 635w, (25:05:93) 893
Retirement pensions (18:05:93) 161-3
Social security payments 137w, 185-7w, 297w, 455-7w, 557w, 636-7w

Automobile Association
Motorway service areas 89w

Average earnings
Northern Ireland 599w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 599w

AWE Aldermaston
Cancer 149-50w
Vacancies 80w

AWE Burghfield
149-50w

Aylesbury
Bypasses (24:05:93) 729-34

Azerbaijan
514-5w

Baggage allowances
Air safety 1w

Bail
380w
Extradition 564-5
Nadir, Asil 564-5

Bail hostels
Greater London 566w

Bailey Committee
see Royal Palaces Fire Protection Measures Inquiry

Balance of payments
Tourist industry 111w

Balance of trade
224w, 225, 232
Manufactured goods 334-5w

***Baldry, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment*
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 78-82, 84-5
Questions
Assured tenancies, Rent increases 701w
Building regulations, Ventilation 619-20w
Caravan sites, Travelling people 616w
Construction materials, Standards specifications 700w
Council house sales, Advertising 702w
Empty housing, Repairs & maintenance 618-9w
Environmental impact assessment, EC law 354-5w
Estate Action 917-8
Estate Action, Yorkshire & Humberside 917
Fire regulations 699w
Flats over shops initiative 57w
Glass, Standards specifications 700w
Government buildings, Repairs & maintenance 615w
Homelessness, West Midlands 180w
Hostels, Planning permission 57w
Housing, Rural areas 907
Housing associations 530w
Housing associations, Land acquisition 57-8w
Housing construction, Council housing 615w
Housing construction, Planning permission 58w, 357w
Housing Corporation, Housing construction 181-2w
Housing estates, Repairs & maintenance 917
Leasehold housing, Local government expenditure 698w
Listed buildings, Greater London 697w
Multiple occupation, Licensing 58w
Opencast mining, Planning permission 368w
Opencast mining, Production 701w
Public lavatories, Sleeping rough 356-7w
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Performance standards 98w
Rent increases 358w
Rented housing, Rural areas 907-8
Shared ownership schemes 617w
Sleeping rough, Outer London boroughs 701w
Tenants' incentive scheme 353-4w

Bailiffs
Leicester 656w

Ballyconnell Canal
Administrative costs 460w
EC grants & loans 459-60w

Bank of Credit & Commerce International
Company liquidations 116w

Bank of England
334w

Banks
Licensing 334w
Small businesses 224w

Banks, Mr Matthew
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 156
Local government staff, Employment protection 914
Lorry drivers, Working hours 483-4w
NHS trusts, Wales 3
Northern Ireland government 362
Overseas Trade Service, Manpower 236-7
Red Star, Privatisation 409w
Social security benefits, Per capita costs 457w
Tourism, Republic of Ireland 291w
Training, Young people 735

Banks, Mr Robert
Questions
Chlorofluorocarbons, Refrigerators 365w
Motorway service areas, Road signs 684w
Recycling 356w
Recycling, Local government services 356w

Banks, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Bureaucracy (18:05:93) 171
Drug abuse (18:05:93) 174-7
Prostitution, Stamford Hill (18:05:93) 164
Questions
County Hall 599-600w
Jubilee line 560-1

Banw Primary School
Grant maintained schools 650w

BAOR
Advisory services 455w
Army strength 624w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Questions
BAOR, Army strength 624w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 577-8
British Rail, Travel concessions 407w
Council of Ministers, Voting behaviour 250w
Departmental correspondence, Journalists 250w
Jobplan workshops 521-2w
Manufacturing industries, East Midlands 234
Offshore safety, Enforcement 622-3w
Prescription charges, Pregnant women 509w
Prescription charges exemptions 508w
Smoke alarms, Social security recipients 187w
Smoke alarms, Public sector housing 502w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 46-7w
Voting behaviour, EC Industry Council 452w
Redundancy 741

Barry
Hospitals 715w

Bass
Fish conservation 363w

Bates, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 300-1
Questions
Automobile Association, Motorway service areas 89w
Manufacturing industries, Teesside 227

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 76
Questions
Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs, Public appointments 504w, 576w
Arab boycott 228
Cheque cards, Photographs 240-1w
Committee on the Review of Medicines, Public appointments 437-40w
Higher education, Citizen's Charter 248w
Identity cards 203-4w
Industrial research 581-2w

Batiste, Mr Spencer—continued
Limited list prescribing 330w
Overseas trade, Israel 116w
Rover Group, Takeovers 580-1w
Social security abuse, Identity cards 693w

Battered women
Courts 16
Legal aid 15

Batteries
Recycling 583w

Battersea power station
599-600w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Council housing, Housing associations 181w
Council housing management, Contracts for services 181w
Developing countries, Housing construction 104w
Drug abuse, Community care 330w
Homelessness 180w, 906
Residential care, Contracts for services 297w

Bayley, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 619-22, 718
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 799-802, 858-9
Questions
Director of Passenger Rail Franchising, York 411w
Educational finance, Yorkshire & Humberside 384-5w

BBC
122-3w

BBC External Services
254w

BCCI
see Bank of Credit & Commerce International

Becket, Rt Hon Margaret
Questions
Local Government Commission for England 532w
Public expenditure 749

Beef
South America 363w
West Africa 172w, 363w

Beef premiums
543w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Questions
Dyslexia, Teacher training 292w
Educational assessment, Northern Ireland 159w
Hostels, Northern Ireland 462w, 500w
Play groups, Government grants 22-3w, 147-8w, 158w
Social security payments 557w
Social security payments, Residential care 687-8w
Travel to interview scheme, Northern Ireland 461w, 597-8w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 669-71
Questions
House of Commons Commission, House of Commons select committees 484w
Palace of Westminster, Building regulations 171w
Student numbers 247w
Tax yields, Entertainers 283-4w

Belfast Airport
Air fares 358-9

Belfast City Hospital
374-5

Belgium
203-4w

Belize
Armed forces deployment 143w, 144-6
Armed forces training 229w
Low flying 143w
Rain forests 21w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Questions
Shopping centres, Northern Ireland 356

Belvedere
Incinerators 579w

Bendall, Mr Vivian
Questions
Police, Private sector 210w
Taxis, Licensing 2-3w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benefits Agency district offices
Manchester 78-9w

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 382, 418-21, 463-4

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 72, 75, 80, 85, 106-9
Closure of Footpaths, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (26:05:93) 945-6
Questions
AWE Aldermaston, Vacancies 80w
Ecolabelling 908
Employment protection 520w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 364
Polaris, Operating costs 79-80w
Trident, Operating costs 81w

Beresford, Sir Paul
Questions
Priority routes, Bus services 407w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Questions
Imitation guns 237-8w
Legal aid, Women 16

Betts, Mr Clive
Questions
Empty housing 912

Bickley, Raymond
Legal representation 166w

Billing
Local authorities 326w

Biological weapons
Arms control 82w

Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council
(26:05:93) 923-37

Birds
Import of live animals 172w

Birmingham relief road
Construction costs 86w
Road construction 155w

Black Country Development Corporation
Public appointments 700-1w

Blair, Mr Tony
Questions
Crime victims, Administration of justice 13w
Criminal proceedings 4-14w
Crown courts, Trials 70-1w
Group 4 Securitas, Prisoner escorts 91-3w
Prisoners' transport, Death 205-6w

Blakenhurst Prison
Per capita costs 68-9w

Blind
Expenditure 557-8w
North West region 505w

Blindness
Diabetes 709w

Blood
Screening 668w

Blood donors
30w, 331w

Blunkett, Mr David
Questions
AIDS, Disease control 257-8w
AIDS, Government grants to voluntary organisations 258w
Children, Deviance & behaviour disorders 447w
Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit 258w
Doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 330w
Educational health services 330-1w
Educational psychology 405w
Educational psychology, Finance 404-5w
Educational psychology, Manpower 405-7w
Eye disorders, Health surveys 257w
Hospital patients, Hospital admissions 151-2w
Hospital patients, Hospital discharges 152w
NHS Management Executive 151w
Post traumatic stress disorder, Counselling 446w
Public Health Guidance Review Committee 151w
Regional health authorities, Disclosure of information 445w
School nurses, Manpower 331w
Unruly children 407w

Board of Inland Revenue
see Inland Revenue

Boateng, Mr Paul
Questions
Courts, Privatisation 14-5
Legal profession, Equal opportunities 657w
Legal profession, Student grants 403w, 656-7w
Obscene Publications Act 1959 62w

Body, Sir Richard
Questions
Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee, EC grants & loans 594-5w
France, Strawberries 243w

Bomb disposal
Gower 679w

Bombings
Church property 12
City of London 700w, 722w
Northern Ireland (24:05:93) 581, (27:05:93) 1035-44
St Ethelburgas' Church 12
Standing Order No 20 applications (24:05:93) 581

Booth, Mr Hartley
Questions
Civil service, Labour costs 666w
Empty housing 609-10w
Mortgage relief 665-6w

Borneo
229w

Bosnia-Herzegovina
43w, 162-5w, (18:05:93) 166-9, 251w, 372w
Armed conflict 44-5w, 345w, 514w, 516w, 571-80
Armed forces 261w
Armed forces deployment 140-1w, 150-1, 156, 345w
International aid from international bodies 251w, 349w
Military aircraft 84w, 141w, 344-5w, 371-2w, 624w, 681w
Overseas aid 377-8w
Peace keeping operations 253w, 373-4w
Peace negotiations 371-2w, 574w
Prisoners 254w
Rape 348w
Refugees 95w
War crimes (18:05:93) 178-81

Boswell, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education
Debates etc.
Legal education (27:05:93) 1098-102
Questions
Dept for Education, Computer privacy 21-2w

Boswell, Mr Tim—continued
Dept for Education, Parliamentary questions 23w
Further education, Handicapped students 492w
Headteachers, Pay 493-4w
Higher education, Citizen's Charter 652w
Higher education colleges 105w
National vocational qualifications 168w
Oxford University, Fees & charges 332-3w
Social sciences education, Research finance 245w
Student grants 491w
Student grants, Legal profession 403w
Student loans 23w, 105w, 492w
Student numbers 247w
Teacher training 493w, 652w
Teachers, Pay 495-6w
Trans european mobility scheme for university students, Science education 106w
Youth services, Local government services 22w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 711, 717-8, 727
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 772, 785, 820-1, 854, 868
Questions
Bus services, Greater London 1-2w
Channel 3, Broadcasting licences 123w
East London river crossing, Oxleas Wood 557
Official visits, USA 291w
Police 565w
Police, Scotland 584w
Police, Wales 648w
Police authorities 565w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 598w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Average earnings 599w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Religion 598w
South Africa, Overseas aid 568-9
Television, Manpower 122-3w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 360

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia, Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Allitt, Beverley, Infanticide 669-70w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 195w

Bovine somatotropin
Medicines Commission 114w

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
687w
Pembrokeshire 135-6w
Wales 135-6w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 454
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 759
Questions
Mental illness, Surveys 193w
Nuclear reactors, Harmonisation of standards 487w
Nuclear safety, Eastern Europe 487w
Occupational pensions, Civil servants 534w

Bowis, Mr John
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 98-102
Export promotion (21:05:93) 536-8
Inflation, Points of order (21:05:93) 509
Sports (17:05:93) 31-2, 38
Whales (17:05:93) 25
Questions
Civil defence, Government grants to local authorities 98w
Countryside Commission 703w
Extortion, Prosecutions 289w
Government grants to local authorities, Wandsworth 915
HMSO 662w
Jubilee line 661w
Railway network, Nottinghamshire 2w

Boyce, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Disability living allowance, Alzheimer's disease 77w
Disability living allowance, Mentally disadvantaged 77w
Disability living allowance, Social security benefits rules 77w
Patient's Charter 254-5w

Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Questions
Home Office, Public expenditure 476w
Housing finance 530-1w
Inner city areas, Government grants 703-4w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Questions
Independent Living 1993 Fund 138w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 458w
West Coast railway line, Railway maintenance 408w

Brandreth, Mr Gyles
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 615-6
Sports (17:05:93) 46, 47

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 929-30

Brazier, Mr Julian
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 578-9
Defence review 141-2
Housing construction 916-7

BRE environmental assessment method
526-7w

Breast cancer
442-4w
Pendle 255w
Screening 255w

Brecon Beacons National Park
647w

Brewing industry
691-2w

Bridgend
Assisted areas 713w

Bridges
Design 412w
River Dee 556
River Thames 3-4w

Bristol University
207-9w

British Aerospace
511w, 580-1w
Broughton 237

British Airways
580w
Competition 579-80w

British Antarctic Survey
157-8w

British Coal Corporation
229w, 488w, 693w
Coal mine closures 692w
Pension funds 223w, 369w, 450w, 583-4w
Privatisation 692-3w
Redundancy 692w

British Columbia
Wales 50w

British dependent territories
Overseas aid 103w

British embassies
Construction 375w

British Gas
Exports 236

British Leyland
see Rover Group

British nationality
196w

British Nuclear Fuels
Company finance 226w, 451w
Disclosure of information 579w

British Nuclear Test Veterans' Association
368-9w

British Overseas Trade Board
(21:05:93) 481-540

British Pharmacopoeia Commission
Public appointments 437-40w

British Rail
410w, 416w, (21:05:93) 479
Accountability 682w
Finance 750
Pension funds 235-6w, 570w
Privatisation 88-9w, 235w, 410-2w, 554, (24:05:93) 584-727, (25:05:93) 758-874
Travel concessions 2w, 407w

British Railways (No 4) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Order for resuming adjourned 2R read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903

British residents abroad
Insurance 541w
Medical treatment abroad 32w
Taxation 14-5w

British Telecom
Government shareholding 419-20w, 541w

British Waterways Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R (17:05:93) 71-114

British Waterways Board
(17:05:93) 71-114

British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(25:05:93) 875-92

British Wool Marketing Board
(25:05:93) 875-92

Broadcasting licences
Channel 3 123w

Broadgreen Hospital
Hospital closures 148w

Bromley Borough Council
Fraud 179-80w

Brook Advisory Centres
Northern Ireland 360-1

***Brooke, Rt Hon Peter**, Secretary of State for National Heritage*
Questions
Arts 244-5w
Arts Council grants 17-8w
Channel 3, Broadcasting licences 123w
Concessionary television licences, Residential care 123w
County Hall 599-600w
Digital television 478-9w
Drama, Arts finance 15-7w
Everyman Theatre Liverpool, Arts finance 125-6w
Marble Hill House, Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England 17w
Objects in lieu of tax 480w
Press, Privacy 189w
Radio Authority, Franchising 124w
Radio broadcasting licences 124w
Radio broadcasting licences, Ethnic minorities 124w
Radio broadcasting licences, West Midlands 124w
Religious buildings, Property transfer 191w
Royal Palaces Fire Protection Measures Inquiry 600w

***Brooke, Rt Hon Peter**—continued*
Television, Manpower 122-3w
Television reception 480w
Television reception, Pendle 599w

Broomfield Hospital
196w

Broughton
British Aerospace 237

Brown, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 455-62, 467

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 268-71
Sports (17:05:93) 56
Questions
Marble Hill House, Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England 17w
War Pensions Agency 564w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 307, 335
Hospitals, Trafford (18:05:93) 161
Recess motions (18:05:93) 195-8
Questions
Business statements 369-72
Helicopter carriers, Defence contracts 149, 627w
Helicopter carriers, Defence procurement 625-7w
Kvaerner Govan, Government grants 582w
Personal tax allowances 572w
Taxpayers, Income tax 573-4w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Defence contracts 627w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering, Defence procurement 626w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 309, 334
Questions
Agriculture, EC advisory committees 542-3w
Business questions 377-8
Cellular phones, Fraud 225-6
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 354
Integrated administration & control system 542w
Nigeria, Overseas aid 376w
Radioactive waste disposal 904
South Africa, Democracy 568

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 264
Defence industries (19:05:93) 318-22
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 825-7
Questions
Insurance companies, Company accounts 231

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 382, 396, 398, 407
Questions
Inflation 235

Building industry
Housing construction 916
Unemployment 131w
Wales 642w, 644w

Building regulations
Northern Ireland 461-2w
Palace of Westminster 171w
Ventilation 619-20w

Building repairs
Crown Office for Scotland 212-3w
Royal High School 212-3w
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley 279w
Withybush Hospital 471-2w

Building Research Establishment
526-7w

Building workers
Germany 41w

Builth Wells
Road accidents 470w
Road traffic 469w

Builth Wells bypass
469w

Burden, Mr Richard
Questions
Contraceptives, Limited list prescribing 576w
Family planning 576w
Homelessness 614-5w
Housing benefits, Contracts for services 694w
Social security abuse 289w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 296-7w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Pay 184-5w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Health service staff 670w

Bureaucracy
(18:05:93) 170-4

Burglary
Wales 238-40w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 311, 315-9
Questions
Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry 150w
Crown Prosecution Service, Equal opportunities 567
EC Finance Council 666-7w
European Parliament members, Pensions 161-2w
Inland Revenue, Scotland 15w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Hospital patients 196w
Public sector borrowing abroad 667w
Road traffic control, Cameras 556
Tax assessment 107-9w

***Burt, Mr Alistair**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security*
Questions
Benefits Agency district offices, Manchester 78-9w
Child Support Act 1991, Tribunals 297w
Council tax benefits 636w
Family credit, Expenditure 323w
Housing benefits, Contracts for services 694w
Housing benefits, Homelessness 559w
Housing benefits, Warrington 139-40w
Income support, Mortgages 72w, 558-60w, 693w
Income support, Pensioners 631-2w
Income support, Pregnant women 298w
Income support, Social security benefits disqualification 140w
Income support, Social security payments 306-8w
Income support, Tower Hamlets 136w
Income support, Wales 457-8w, 633-4w
Income support, Young people 78w, 309w
Residential care, Contracts for services 297w
Severe disability premium, Social security benefits rules 560w
Severe hardship provision, Durham County 694-7w
Social security abuse 289w
Social security appeals, Scotland 459w
Social security benefits, Per capita costs 457w
Social security benefits, Performance standards 632-4w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Pay 184-5w
Social security recipients 556w
Social security recipients, Refugees 184w
Social security recipients, Smoke alarms 187w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 72w
Unemployment benefits, Occupational pensions 562-3w

Bus fares
87-8w

Bus services
Competition 562-4
Contracts for services 1-2w

Bus services—continued
Greater London 1-2w, 562-3
Priority routes 407w

Bus stations
Scotland 215w

Buses
1w, 87w

Business motions
(21:05:93) 54

Business premises
Rents (18:05:93) 158-60

Business questions
372-9

Business start-up scheme
East Midlands 518-9w
North West region 518w
Wales 709w

Business statements
369-72

Butcher, Mr John
Questions
Capital taxes 225
Pupil exclusions 606w
Pupil exclusions, Special education 607w

Butler, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 430-2
Maiden speeches (20:05:93) 430-2

Butterfill, Mr John
Questions
EC enlargement 749-50

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg
see Welsh Language Board

Byers, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 305, 331
Questions
City technology colleges, Land acquisition 652w
Educational assessment 167w
Government buildings, Dept of Employment 655-6w
Government buildings, Dept of Social Security 694w
Government buildings, Dept of the Environment 702w
Government buildings, Home Office 725w
Helicopter carriers, Defence procurement 232w, 511w
Kvaerner Govan, Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 288-9w

Bypasses
483w
A36 571w
Aylesbury (24:05:93) 729-34

Calcutt Committee
see Privacy & Press Law Review

Caledonian MacBrayne
587w

Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 28

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Arts 244-5w
Blind, Expenditure 557-8w
Blind, North West region 505w
Employment protection 524w
Litter, Prosecutions 238w
Museums & galleries, Government grants 189w
Museums & galleries, Purchase grants 479w
Museums & galleries, Repairs & maintenance 189-90w

Callaghan, Mr Jim—continued
Road construction, Road safety 568w
Salmonella 577w

Cambodia
Human rights 45-6w
Mines 103w
Overseas aid 103w
Peace negotiations 46w

Cambridge University
Fees & charges 332-3w

Cameras
Road traffic control 556

Cammell Laird
Oil rigs 232-3

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 930-1

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Questions
Aerospace industry, Mergers 511w
Arms trade, Trade fairs 510w
Navy, Exhibitions 510-1w
Trident missiles 147

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 255-6
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 878-82, 887-9
Points of order (27:05:93) 1034
Poultry meat (27:05:93) 1091
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 376w
Agricultural subsidies 243-4w
Assisted areas, Cumbria 239
Beef, South America 363w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 576-7
Business questions 376
Radioactive waste disposal 904-5
Revenue support grant, Cumbria County Council 610-1w

Canary Wharf
661w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Questions
Balance of trade 224w
Business questions 373
Northern Ireland government 289-90w, 357
Police custody, Complaints against police 293-4w
Police interrogation, Rights of accused 292-3w
Police interrogation, Video recordings 294w

Cancer
AWE Aldermaston 149-50w
Death 668w
Medical treatments 437w
Non-ionizing radiation 147w
Young people 149-50w

Cancer hazards
Diethylstilboestrol 507w

Cann, Mr Jamie
Questions
Maternal mortality 28w

Capital taxes
225

Car industry
Foreign investment in UK 231-2

Car tax
Tax yields 418-9w

Caravan sites
Travelling people 616w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution 286w
Exhaust emission controls 415-6w

Carbon tax
EC action 487-8w

Cardiff Airport
Air routes 555w

Cardiff Bay barrage
(17:05:93) 115-29, 546w

Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 115-29

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
(17:05:93) 115-29, 712-3w
Recruitment 49-50w

Cardiff City Council
(17:05:93) 115-29

Cardiff Prison
Prison education services 207-9w

Career development loan scheme
Employment opportunities 217w

Career structure
Midwives 145w
Nurses 145w, 498w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 950, 953, 957-8, 970-5, 979
Questions
Agriculture, Environment protection 53w
Banwy Primary School, Grant maintained school 650w
Beef premiums 543w
Cattle, Wales 649w
Contracts of employment 655w
Disabled workers, Unemployment 621-2w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 5
Fertility, Medical treatments 578w
Fires, Factories 65w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Wales 10
Handicapped pupils, Teacher training 24w, 53w
In vitro fertilisation, Wales 650w
Industrial health & safety, EC law 40w
Industrial health & safety, Orders & regulations 41w, 621w
Integrated administration & control system 596w
Integrated administration & control system, Wales 649w
Manpower Services Commission, Codes of practice 620-1w
Mental illness, Medical research 32w
Origin marking, Leather & fur industries 34w
Roads, Greater London 569w
Tibet, China 659-60w
Unemployment, Graduates 131-2w

Carlisle, Mr John
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 33, 45-50, 52

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Transport
Debates etc.
A27, Worthing (20:05:93) 475-8
Aylesbury bypass (24:05:93) 731-4
Questions
A19, Road works 570w
A36, Bypasses 571w
A550, Road accidents 482w
A550, Road construction 481-3w
A550, Road traffic 481w, 483w
A550, Road traffic control 482w
Automobile Association, Motorway service areas 89w
Birmingham relief road, Construction costs 86w
Birmingham relief road, Road construction 155w
Bridges, Design 412w
Bypasses 483w
Lorries 90w

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth—continued
Lorry drivers, Working hours 483-4w
M1-M62 link 412-3w
M3, Road construction 156w, 570w
M6, Planning compensation 4w
Motorway service areas, Road signs 684w
"Reducing Transport Emissions Through Planning" 155-6w
Road accidents, Injuries 568w
Road construction, Cost benefit analysis 414w
Road construction, Public inquiries 570-1w
Road construction, Road safety 568w
Road construction, Urban areas 416w
Road haulage licences 684w
Road traffic 413-4w
Road traffic, Road construction 685w
Road works, Contracts 553
Selby bypass, Road construction 237w
Speed limits, Road safety 409-10w
Transport of radioactive materials, Plutonium 156w
Transport supplementary grants 156w

Carpet industry
Scotland 212w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1059-60
Questions
European fighter aircraft, Defence procurement 144

Carrying of Knives Etc (Scotland) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102

Cars
Exports 231-2

Carttiss, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 435-7

Casement Park
Homicide 290w

Cash, Mr William
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 406-7, 422, 465
Railways Bill, Rep.& 3R (25:05:93) 834-5
Questions
Incinerators, EC law 173w
Incinerators, Planning permission 173w
Western European Union, Defence expenditure 79-81w
Western European Union, UK contributions 81w

Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (Area & Constitution) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584

Cattle
Wales 649w

CD-ROM
Official Report 380w

Cellular phones
Fraud 225-6

Central Council of Physical Recreation
(17:05:93) 29-70

Central Europe
Nuclear safety 487w

Central line
Railway closures 86w

Central London
Church buildings 71-2w

Central Office of Information
363-4w

Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee
(24:05:93) 584-727

Central Science Laboratory
596-7

Central Veterinary Laboratory
596-7

Centre for Urban Policy Studies
Deprivation indicators 58-9w

Cereals
Agricultural production 714w
Wales 714w

Cerebral palsy
Medical research 30w

Cerebrovascular diseases
Expenditure 503-4w

Ceredigion
544-5w

Cervical cancer
Inverclyde Royal Hospital 449-50w
Paisley 735w
Screening 193w, 449-50w, 735w

Cervical Smear Test Inquiry
449-50w

Cetaceans
(17:05:93) 19-28, 177w

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Select Committee reports 568w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Change of use
57w

Channel 3
Broadcasting licences 123w

Channel tunnel
Railway network 412w, 569w

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Forum
569w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 661-2
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 141w
Customs & Excise 536w
Immigration appeals 722w
Jubilee line 559

Chapman, Mr Sydney, Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 489

Charitable donations
Medical equipment 675w

Charities
Northern Ireland 460w
Shares 107w

Charities Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102

Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy
246w

Chemists shops
Pharmaceutical services 33w
Wales 468w, 639w
West Midlands 261w

Cheque cards
Photographs 240-1w

Cheshire
Youth unemployment 740

Chevening House
Auctions 122w

Child abuse
Death 337-8w
Mental health services 338-9w

Child abuse—continued
Parent & child 255-6w
Prison population 720-1w

Child patients
Hospital visitor benefits 635w
Social Fund 138w

Child prostitution
63w

Child safety
Playgrounds 213-4w

Child Support Act 1991
Questions
Tribunals 297w

Child workers
Conditions of employment 522-3w

Childbirth
437w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast 159w

Children
Age distribution 194-6w
Death 436w
Deviance & behaviour disorders 447w
Environment protection 366w
Hearing aids 160w, 170w
Home Office 63w
Homicide 238w
Hospices 270w
Witnesses 205w

Children Act 1989
Questions
667w

Children in care
146-8w
Local government social services 667w

Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry
150w

Children's rights
Divorce 13-4

Chile
HMS Avenger 345w

China
Family planning 20-1w, 44w
Human rights 516w
Infanticide 44w
Sanctions 43w
Tibet 659-60w

Chisholm, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (27:05:93) 1051
Questions
Council house sales, Edinburgh District Council 269w
Further education colleges, Pay incentives 279-80w
HIV infection, Scottish health boards 274w
Prescription charges exemptions, Scotland 36w
Water pollution, EC law 290w

Chlorofluprocarbons
Air conditioning 527w
Dry cleaning 287-8w
EC law 366-7w
Refrigerators 365w

Christmas bonus
Social security benefits rates 323w

Church buildings
Central London 71-2w
Insurance 71-2w

Church Commissioners
Publications 13

Church property
Bombings 12
Rents 12-3

Churchill, Mr Winston
Questions
Pensions, EC countries 187w

Citizen's Charter
85w, 496w
Further education 248w
Higher education 248w, 652w

City action teams
416w

City challenge
703-4w
Liverpool 59w

City of London
Bombings 700w, 722w

City technology colleges
Land acquisition 652w
Liverpool 652w

Civil & Public Services Association
417w

Civil defence
Government grants to local authorities 98w

Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584
Questions
95w

Civil Legal Aid (Scope) Regulations 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 728

Civil liability
Environment protection 225w

Civil servants
Contracts for services 565w
Dept of Employment 217w
Occupational pensions 534w

Civil servants' business appointments
Prisons 565w

Civil service
Labour costs 666w

Civil service agencies
Court Service 657-8w
Defence Research Agency 265-6w
Directorate General of Test & Evaluation 265-6w
Parliamentary questions 72-3w, 651w
Performance standards 683-4w
Privatisation 683-4w
Scotland 584-6w

Civil service dispersal
Customs & Excise 113-4w
Expenditure 535w
Inverness 421w
Treasury 421w

Civil service manpower
Agriculture 362-3w
Attorney General 380w
Dept of Health 504w
Dept of Trade & Industry 452w
Fisheries 362-3w, 470w
Sustainable development 283w

Civil service pensions
666w

Civil service unions
Deregulation initiative 240

Clappison, Mr James
Questions
Negative equity 366w
Take-up of employment 738

Clark, Alan
Autobiography 565-6
Telephone tapping 333w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 297-303, 306, 310
Questions
Defence review 142

Clark, Dr David—continued
Helicopter carriers, Defence contracts 143-4
Military discipline, Falkland Islands 234w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Defence procurement 145w
War crimes, Falkland Islands 266w

Clarke, Mr Eric
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Pension funds 223w

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Secretary of State for the Home Department
Questions
Bombings, City of London 722w
Contracts for services, Employment protection 97w, 209w, 241w
Forensic Science Service 210w
Home Office, Contracts for services 427w
Home Office, Government buildings 725w
Home Office, Parliamentary questions 62-3w
Home Office, Public expenditure 476w
Home Office, Select Committee reports 473-4w
National Board for Crime Prevention 725-6w
Police 565w
Publications 60w
Royal family, Electronic surveillance 238w
Thorn Cross Youth Custody Centre, Prison education services 477w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Contracts for services 97w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Management 427w

Class sizes
Educational standards 23w

Clean Air Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102

Clelland, Mr David
Questions
Standard spending assessments 611w

Clergy
Tied housing 71w

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 881-2
Questions
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Recruitment 49-50w
Council tax, Appeals 699w
Council tax, Valuation 114w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 5
Electoral reform 366
Exports 224
Industrial health & safety, Orders & regulations 129w
Industrial health & safety, Prosecutions 130w
Landlord & tenant, Law reform 16-7
Overseas aid, Family planning 252w
Police, Evidence 425-6w
Small businesses, Standards specifications 285w
UN Conference on Environment & Development, UK delegations 350w

Climate
Conferences 356w

Clinical laboratories
Technicians 195w, 579w

Clinical trials
Zidovudine 579w

Closure of Footpaths Bill 1992/93 (Proposed)
Debates etc.
Motion to introduce Bill negatived (26:05:93) 943-8

Clothier Inquiry
see Allitt Inquiry

Clothing industry
GATT 229-30
Textile industry 221w

Clothing industry—continued
Trade fairs 118w

Clwyd
Regional enterprise grants 545-6w
Regional selective assistance 546w
Small businesses 549-51w
SMART awards 552w
Support for products under research scheme 640w

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Royal residences, Points of order (26:05:93) 948
Questions
Listed buildings, Greater London 697w

Coal
Electricity generation 223-4
Local government expenditure 702w

Coal consumption
Power stations 693w

Coal mine closures
223w
British Coal Corporation 692w
Government assistance 222-3w

Coal mining
Energy review 489w
Privatisation 488w

Coastal protection
Devon 25-6w

Coastal zone management
EC law 98-9w

Cockburnspath bypass
Road accidents 588w
Road safety 587-8w

Coe, Mr Sebastian
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 999-1000

Coffey, Ms Ann
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 278

Cohen, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Abortion Clinics (Access) Bill, 1R (19:05:93) 241-3
Questions
Central line, Railway closures 86w
China, Sanctions 43w
Commodity prices 235
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 515w
Computer privacy, Attorney General 323w
Computer privacy, Dept for Education 21-2w
Computer privacy, Dept of Employment 218-22w
Computer privacy, Dept of Health 146w
Computer privacy, Dept of National Heritage 189w
Computer privacy, Dept of Social Security 138-9w
Computer privacy, Dept of the Environment 364-5w
Computer privacy, Dept of Trade & Industry 286-7w
Computer privacy, Dept of Transport 234w
Computer privacy, EC action 204w
Computer privacy, EC law 338w
Computer privacy, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 101-2w
Computer privacy, Home Office 726-7w
Computer privacy, Lord Chancellor's Dept 315-6w
Computer privacy, Medical records 194w
Computer privacy, Metropolitan Police 477-8w
Computer privacy, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 171w
Computer privacy, Ministry of Defence 344w
Computer privacy, Northern Ireland Office 688w
Computer privacy, Prime Minister 33w

Cohen, Mr Harry—continued
Computer privacy, Scottish Office 270w
Computer privacy, Treasury 282w
Computer privacy, Welsh Office 472w
Deregulation initiative 148
Legal aid, Battered women 15
Nuclear reactors, Decommissioning 344w
Nurses, Career structure 145w

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
A36, Bypasses 571w
Dept of Social Security, Computer applications 457w
Environmental management options scheme 226-7w
Environmental technology innovation scheme 286w
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 380w

Combined heat & power
Energy research 532w

Comfrey
115w
Health hazards 32-3w

Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment
149-50w

Committee on Safety of Medicines
437-40w

Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food
676w

Committee on the Review of Medicines
Public appointments 437-40w

Commodities
Developing countries 377w

Commodity prices
235

Commonwealth Development Corporation
751-2

Community action
746
West Midlands 745-6

Community action programmes
646w

Community care
366-7
Alcoholism 330w
Drug abuse 330w
Finance 273-4w
Handicapped 506w
Scotland 273-4w, 732w

Community charge
Non-payment 360w

Community charge reduction scheme
367w

Community development
Liverpool 182w

Commuters
Railway travel 553-4

Companies
Debts 106-7w

Companies Registration Office (England & Wales)
Performance standards 489w

Company accounts
Insurance companies 230-1

Company Directors' Disqualification Act 1986
Questions
116w

Company disclosure of information
Shareholders 224w

Company finance
451w
British Nuclear Fuels 226w, 451w

Company liquidations
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 116w

Company management
Management techniques 639w
Wales 639w

Company registration
Group 4 Securitas 120w

Company taxation
Tax harmonisation (24:05:93) 727-8

Competition
British Airways 579-80w
Bus services 562-4
local government services 355w

COMPEX
377w

Complaints
Low flying 143-4w

Complaints against police
Police custody 293-4w

Compliance cost assessments
99w

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty
84w, 515w

Computer applications
Customs & Excise 417w
Dept of Social Security 457w
Police 724w

Computer privacy
Attorney General 323w
Dept for Education 21-2w
Dept of Employment 218-22w
Dept of Health 146w
Dept of National Heritage 189w
Dept of Social Security 138-9w
Dept of the Environment 364-5w
Dept of Trade & Industry 286-7w
Dept of Transport 234w
EC action 204w
EC law 338w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 101-2w
Home Office 726-7w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 315-6w
Medical records 194w
Metropolitan Police 477-8w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 171w
Ministry of Defence 344w
Northern Ireland Office 688w
Police records 338w
Prime Minister 33w
Scottish Office 270w
Treasury 282w
Welsh Office 472w

Computers in government departments
Geographical information systems 617w

Computers in higher education
105w

Computers in schools
105w

Concessionary fares
Disability living allowance 458-9w
Pensioners 561-2
Railway travel 562
Walsall Borough Council 458-9w

Concessionary television licences
Residential care 123w

Condensation
Health hazards 578w

Conditions of employment
Child workers 522-3w
Ministerial policy advisors 368w
Youth employment 522-3w

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe
see European Security Conference

Conferences
Climate 356w
Partnership for Change 528w

Confessions
Convictions 722w

Confiscation orders
Drug crimes 239-40w, 719-20w

Congdon, Mr David
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 150-1
Bus services, Competition 562-3
EC Agriculture Council 685-6w
Official engagements 250w
Tenants' incentive scheme 353-4w

Connah's Quay
Power stations 546w

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 263, 269-70, 281, 284, 290
Questions
SubSaharan Africa, Economic situation 379w

Consar
Defence contracts 230w

Construction costs
Birmingham relief road 86w
Quarry House 635w

Construction materials
Standards specifications 700w

Consultants
National lottery 190-1w

Contempt of court
566

Contraceptives
Limited list prescribing 255w, 576w

Contracts
Health services 256w
Road works 553

Contracts for services
Bus services 1-2w
Civil servants 565w
Cost effectiveness 322-3w
Council housing management 181w
Council tax benefits 694w
Employment protection 97w, 209w, 241w
Home Office 427w, 475-6w
Housing benefits 694w
Local government services 364w, 609w, 716-7w
Office of Public Service & Science 363-4w
Prison Service 426w
Residential care 297w
Scottish councils 588w
Scottish health boards 449w
Scottish Prison Service 730w
Social Security Benefits Agency 296-7w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 97w
Welsh Office 555w

Contracts of employment
655w

Convictions
Confessions 722w
Drinking & driving 425w
Homicide 290w
Motor vehicle theft 428-34w
Parsons, Brian 93w
Scottish courts 499-500w

Conway, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 262-6
Defence industries (19:05:93) 310

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 302, 304

Cook, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Points of order (26:05:93) 938-9
Questions

Cook, Mr Robin—continued
Balance of trade 225
Electricity generation, Coal 223-4

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Questions
Local authority powers 918-9
Training, Young people 740-1

Coombs, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 931
Sports (17:05:93) 29-36
Questions
Training, Wales 9

Cooperatives
Employment opportunities 132w

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John, Paymaster-General
Questions
Car tax, Tax yields 418-9w
Customs & Excise 536w
Customs & Excise, Civil service dispersal 113-4w
Customs & Excise, Drug crimes 242w
Drug crimes, Crime prevention 417w
Drug seizures, EC countries 417-8w
Economic policy, Environment protection 666w
Offensive weapons, Import controls 161w
Smuggling, Animals 418w
Sustainable development, Civil service manpower 283w
Tobacco duties, Tax yields 283w
VAT, Energy prices 535w
VAT, Fuels 281w
VAT returns 113w

Corbett, Mr Robin
Questions
World Health Organisation, Tuberculosis 570

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 388, 389
Questions
Coal mine closures 223w
Health education, Manpower 153-4w
Homicide, Convictions 290w
Unemployment, Holloway 519-20w

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Bosnia-Herzegovina (18:05:93) 166-9
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 395-6, 460
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 768-4, 769-70
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 573
Business questions 372

Cornwall
Crime 241-2w

Cornwall County Council
367-8w

Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit
258w

Corporation tax
Small businesses 283w

Corston, Ms Jean
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 286
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 606
Questions
British Rail, Pension funds 570w
Cervical cancer, Screening 193w
Child abuse, Mental health services 338-9w
Directors, Disqualifications 116w

Cotgrave colliery
692-3w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 664-5
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 692-3w

Couchman, Mr James—continued
Road works, Contracts 553

Council for Science & Technology
(26:05:93) 923-37

Council house sales
608w
Advertising 702w
Edinburgh District Council 269w
Local government revenue 612-3w

Council housing
Empty housing 911-3
Housing associations 181w
Housing construction 615w

Council housing management
Contracts for services 181w
Council tenants 717-8w
Housing estates 917
Wales 717-8w

Council of Europe
European Convention on Human Rights 370w

Council of Ministers
Voting behaviour 250w

Council tax
609w, 699-700w, 910-1
Appeals 699w
Discounts 527-8w
Lambeth Borough Council 910
Scotland 215w
Surrey Heath Borough Council 359-60w
Transitional arrangements 367w, 910
Valuation 114w, 699w
Wales 638w

Council tax benefits
636w
Contracts for services 694w

Council tax capping
Gloucestershire 713-4w
Scotland 735-6w

Council tax exemptions
Mentally disadvantaged 532-3w, 555-6w
Wales 555-6w

Council tenants
Council housing management 717-8w
Disposable income 335w

Counselling
Hormone treatments 668-9w
Post traumatic stress disorder 446w

Countryside Commission
703w

County councils
Local government finance 367-8w
Population 367-8w

County courts
Repossession orders 656w

County Hall
599-600w

Court Service
Civil service agencies 657-8w

Courts
Battered women 16
Jurisdiction (26:05:93) 1015
Privatisation 14-5

Cousins, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Points of order (24:05:93) 583, (25:05:93) 754, (26:05:93) 939-40
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 284-8, 291
Questions
Cars, Exports 232
Multiple occupation, Licensing 58w

Coventry
Homelessness 180w
Unemployment 525w

Coventry—continued
Youth unemployment 517w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Armed forces training 679-80w
Child abuse, Prison population 720-1w
Children in care, Local government social services 667w
Drug crimes, Prison sentences 719w
European Committee for the Prevention of Torture 659w
European Social Fund, Training 622w
Fire regulations 699w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 69w
Police, Manpower 566w
Probation hostels, Greater London 566w
Segregation of prisoners 721w
Submarines 625w

Credit unions
Scotland 738w

Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia
Hormone treatments 669w

Crime
(18:05:93) 181-5
Cornwall 241-2w
Devon 241-2w
Racial conflict 338-9w, 435w

Crime prevention
Customs officers 417w
Drug crimes 417w
Motor vehicle theft 93-4w
Racial attacks 239-40w

Crime victims
Administration of justice 13w

Crimes of violence
London Regional Transport 407w

Criminal appeals
Gilmour, Raymond 269-70w

Criminal Justice Act 1988
Questions
61-2w

Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Designated Countries & Territories) (Amendment) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584

Criminal Justice Act 1991
Questions
425w, 656w

Criminal Justice Bill (HL) 1992/93
Questions
422w
Prison accommodation 422w

Criminal Justice (International Cooperation) Act 1990 (Enforcement of Overseas Forfeiture Orders) (Amendment) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584

Criminal proceedings
4-14w

Criminal records
Prison staff 718-9w

Crisis loans
635w

Croatia
Armed conflict 42-3w, 162-4w
Armed forces deployment 164-5w, 511w
Armed forces uniforms 344w
Arms embargoes 164w, 513-4w
Diplomatic relations 43w
Diplomatic service 165w
Human rights 252-4w, 513w
Mercenaries 514w
Official visits 163w
Overseas aid 348w
Overseas investment 488w
Overseas trade 121w

Croatia—continued
Peace keeping operations 163-4w
Prisoners 574w
Refugees 163-4w
Sanctions 45w, 163w
State visits 42w
Visas 165w
War crimes 162w

Crossrail
367, 369w, 407-8w, 536w
Private investment 569-70w

Crossrail Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903
Questions
372

Crown courts
Trials 70-1w

Crown Office for Scotland
Building repairs 212-3w

Crown Prosecution Service
13w, 425-6w
Equal opportunities 567

Croydon Tramlink Bill (HL) 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903

Cruise missiles
Ukraine 262w

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 74, 77, 81, 92, 96, 99, 109-11
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 381
White Papers, Points of order (26:05:93) 941
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 647, 651, 665-8, 719-20
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 761, 867
Questions
Gibraltar, Debts 102w
Industrial health & safety, Orders & regulations 127w
Intelligence services 122w
Level crossings, Accidents 86w
Lorries 90w
Nurses, Career structure 145w
Textiles, South Korea 693w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 360

Cumbria
Assisted areas 239

Cumbria County Council
Revenue support grant 610-1w

Cummings, Mr John
Questions
Electricity generation, Coal 223
Enterprise zones, Easington 617-8w
St Helena, Official visits 516w
St Helena, Overseas aid 589-90w

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Questions
Day nurseries, West Midlands 525w
Early retirement, Pensions 637w
Homelessness, West Midlands 180w
Occupational pensions, Unemployment 637w
Pension funds 637w
Standard spending assessments 180-1w
Unemployment, West Midlands 525w
Youth unemployment, Coventry 517w

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 387, 394-403, 415

Curriculum
English education 380-1w
First aid 402-3w
Poetry 495w
Special education 608w, 643-4w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 396

Curry, Mr David, Minister of State for Agriculture
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 875-80, 883-5
Questions
Agricultural land, Local government land 542w
Agricultural subsidies 243-4w
Agriculture, EC advisory committees 542-3
Agriculture, Environment protection 543-4w
Bass, Fish conservation 363w
Beef, South America 363w
Beef, West Africa 172w, 363w
Beef premiums 543w
Coastal protection, Devon 25-6w
Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee, EC grants & loans 594-5w
Eggs, Food labelling 242-3w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Public access 596w
Fisheries, Civil service manpower 362-3w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 594w
Flood defence committees, Public appointments 362w
Geographical information systems 543w
Integrated administration & control system 24-5w, 243w, 542w, 596w
Integrated administration & control system, Administrative costs 243w
Milk Marketing Board, Property transfer 25w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Computer privacy 171w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Parliamentary questions 25w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Select Committee reports 595-6w
Peat 596w
Potatoes, EC action 171-2w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 533w, 595w
Set-aside schemes 687w
Set-aside schemes, Land use 243w
Sheep premiums 595w, 687w

Customs & Excise
113w, 338w, 536w
Civil service dispersal 113-4w
Computer applications 417w
Drug crimes 242w

Customs officers
242w
Crime prevention 417w

Cyprus
564-5
Extradition 565
Official visits 157w
Overseas trade 238
Trade barriers 46w

Dafis, Mr Cynog
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 823-5, 836
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 951-2, 959, 975-6
Whales (17:05:93) 27
Questions
Agriculture, Environment protection 544-5w
Air pollution control, EC action 177w
Building industry, Wales 642w, 644w
County courts, Repossession orders 656w
Deserts 349w
Dolphins, Nature conservation 177w
Education, Local government expenditure 466-8w
Employment schemes, Wales 646w
Empty housing, House purchase 534-5w
Empty housing, Wales 708w
Energy management assistance scheme 617w
Glass, Recycling 706w
Housing, Wales 644-5w
Housing benefits, Homelessness 559w
Housing construction, Wales 646w
Income support, Mortgages 558-60w, 706w
Industrial energy consumption 528w
Leasehold housing, Local government expenditure 698w

Dafis, Mr Cynog—continued
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 310-1w
Mortgage relief 534w
Mortgage relief, Low incomes 419w
Mortgages, Wales 645w
Narmada dam 591w
Negative equity, Wales 646w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 230w
Partnership for Change, Conferences 528w
Pesticides 595w
Potatoes, EC action 171-2w
Radiation hazards, Radiation protection 262w
Reed beds, Wales 640-2w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 533w
Shared ownership schemes 617w
Special protection areas, Wales 553-4w
Sustainable development, Civil service manpower 283w
Sustainable development, Wales 51w
Teacher training, Higher education colleges 553w
Temporary accommodation, Wales 708w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (26:05:93) 936-7
Questions
Belize, Rain forests 21w
Clark, Alan, Autobiography 565-6
Hedges & ditches, Scotland 352w
Local government borrowing, Water supply 14w
Oceanography, Surveys 180w
Opencast mining, Armadale 271w
Opencast mining, Planning appeals 351w
Packaging, Germany 118w
Planning appeals, Legal costs 352w
Publications 60w

Dan Air
Takeovers 580w

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 130

Data Protection Registrar
21-2w, 33w, 101-2w, 138-9w, 146w, 171w, 189w, 218-22w, 234w, 270w, 282w, 286-7w, 315-6w, 323w, 344w, 364-5w, 472w, 477-8w, 688w, 726-7w
Medical records 194w

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 264-5
Defence industries (19:05:93) 308, 311-2, 331
Questions
VAT, Energy prices 535w

Davies, Mr Bryan
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 65-7
Questions
Association of County Councils 611w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 428-30
Questions
Llanelli Borough Council, Regional planning & development 311w
Regional planning & development, Wales 49w

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 128
Questions
Development Board for Rural Wales, Public appointments 169w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 5
Local government finance, Wales 11
Parliamentary constituencies, Wales 237w
Regional selective assistance, Employment opportunities 646-7w

Davies, Mr Ron—continued
Sheep, Ear tagging 718w
Slaughterhouses, Wales 713w
Small businesses, Wales 711-2w

Day, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 782

Day care of children
Government grants 552-3w
Training & enterprise councils 469w, 525w
Wales 469w, 552-3w

Day nurseries
West Midlands 525w

Deaf
Public telephones 33w

Death
Cancer 668w
Child abuse 337-8w
Children 436w
Ecstacy 338w
Fryer, Gary 261-2w, 624w
Kearney, Jeremiah 32w
Mattoo, Hamida 660w
Prisoners 566w
Prisoners' transport 205-6w

Debts
Africa 109w
Companies 106-7w
Gibraltar 102w
Water charges 467w

Dec77/270/EURATOM
(26:05:93) 1015

Defence Animal Centre
512w

Defence contracts
Ammunition 116w
Consar 230w
Departmental records 678w
Helicopter carriers 143-4, 149, 627w
Luchaire Defence 678w
Northern region 248w
Scotland 248w
Small businesses 148
SPEL 230w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering 627w

Defence equipment
Sea transport 510w

Defence estimates
House of Commons debates 454w

Defence expenditure
142, 142w
Western European Union 79-81w

Defence industries
Opposition days (19:05:93) 297-341

Defence land
680w
Menwith Hill 681w

Defence Postal & Courier Services
Performance standards 623w

Defence procurement
Armed forces uniforms 677w
EH101 helicopters 142w, 629w
European fighter aircraft 139-40, 144
Helicopter carriers 232w, 511w, 625-7w
Helicopters 148-9
Shipbuilding 142w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders 145w
Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering 626w

Defence Quality Assurance Directorate
265-6w
Mechanical metrology laboratory 263-5w

Defence research
Genetically modified organisms 81-2w
Rolls-Royce 144w

Defence Research Agency
263-5w
Civil service agencies 265-6w

Defence review
140w, 141, 141w, 142
Armed forces reserves 142-3
Empty property 510w
Submarines 142

Defence support agencies
512w

Delyn
Local government reform 50w

Dementia
Health services 147w

Democracy
Mozambique 48-9w
Overseas aid 570
South Africa 568

Denham, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 616-9, 626, 696-7
Questions
Bail, Extradition 564-5
Business questions 375
Relate, Government grants 196-7w

Denmark
488-9w

Dental charges exemptions
Scotland 36w

Dental services
Gwynedd 134w

Dentists
Family health services authorities 470-1w
Wales 470-1w
Working hours 257w

Departmental correspondence
Administrative delays 680w
Edinburgh University Dental School 214w
Hong Kong 210w
Journalists 250w
Sunday Times 663w

Departmental publications
Educational assessment 23w
Electricity generation 34w

Departmental records
Defence contracts 678w

Deportation
Illegal immigrants 433w
Immigrant detainees 433w

Deprivation indicators
Centre for Urban Policy Studies 58-9w

Dept for Education
608w
Computer privacy 21-2w
Parliamentary questions 23w
Select Committee reports 22w

Dept of Employment
Civil servants 217w
Computer privacy 218-22w
Government buildings 655-6w
Parliamentary questions 130-1w
Select Committee reports 248-50w

Dept of Health
Civil service manpower 504w
Computer privacy 146w
Parliamentary questions 30-1w
Select Committee reports 146w

Dept of National Heritage
Computer privacy 189w
Parliamentary questions 123w

Dept of Social Security
Computer applications 457w
Computer privacy 138-9w
Government buildings 694w
Parliamentary questions 77-8w

Dept of the Environment
617w
Computer privacy 364-5w

Dept of the Environment—continued
Government buildings 702w
Parliamentary questions 59w

Dept of Trade & Industry
(21:05:93) 481-540
Civil service manpower 452w
Computer privacy 286-7w
Government buildings 615w
Parliamentary questions 343-4w
Press advertising 490w
Select Committee reports 690-1w

Dept of Transport
Computer privacy 234w
Parliamentary questions 3w

Derbyshire
Local government reform 153
Manufacturing industries 234

Deregulation initiative
99w, 148
Civil service unions 240

Deserts
349w

Design Council
222w

Detention centres
Immigrant detainees 434-5w
Operating costs 435w

Developing countries
Aid financed trade 751-2
Commodities 377w
Family planning 590w
Housing construction 104w
Overseas trade 752
Road construction 379w

Development aid
EC Development Council 18w
Southern Africa 20w

Development areas
Armed forces 143w

Development Board for Rural Wales
Public appointments 169w

Deviance & behaviour disorders
Children 447w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 299, 301
Dogs, Public petitions (17:05:93) 130
Questions
A19, Road works 570w
Defence contracts, Northern region 248w
Design Council 222w
Employment opportunities, Northern region 33-4w
Fryer, Gary, Death 261-2w, 624w
General certificate of secondary education 383w
Stockton on Tees County Court 14
Trade marks 34w

Devon
Coastal protection 2[illegible]w
Crime 241-2w
Sea rescue 237w

Devonport Dockyard
(18:05:93) 2[illegible]-22, 509w

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 245-53, 256, 260, 264, 289
Questions
Social security payments, Retirement pensions 635w

Diabetes
Blindness 709w
Health services 3
Wales 3, 709w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 249, 258-9
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 677, 695-6

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey—continued
Questions
Concessionary fares, Railway travel 562
Northern Ireland government 357-8
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 229

Dicks, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 668-9
Questions
Arts Council grants 17-8w
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 558
Immigration applications 96w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 21w
Social security recipients, Refugees 184w
Treasury, Operating costs 110w

Dietary foods
Prescriptions 436-7w

Dietary supplements
114-5w

Diethylstilboestrol
Cancer hazards 507w
Compensation 508w
Drug side effects 506-8w
Prescriptions 507w
Trade names 508w

"Digest of Environmental Protection & Water Statistics"
533w

Digital television
478-9w

Diphtheria
Whitefield School Nelson 29-30w

Diplomatic relations
Croatia 43w
Ministers' visits abroad 41w

Diplomatic service
Croatia 165w
Human rights 166w
Manpower 374w

DIR85/337/EEC
90-1w, 412-3w, 620w

Dir89/429/EEC
173w

DIR91/156/EEC
99-100w

Dir91/674/EEC
230-1

Dir92/102/EEC
718w

Director of Passenger Rail Franchising
(24:05:93) 584-727, (25:05:93) 758-874
York 411w

Directorate General of Test & Evaluation
Civil service agencies 265-6w

Directors
Disqualifications 116w
Honours 225w
Income tax 418w
NHS trusts 191w

Disability appeal tribunals
Disability living allowance 563w

Disability (Grants) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102

Disability living allowance
562-4w, 629-30w
Alzheimer's disease 77w
Concessionary fares 458-9w
Disability appeal tribunals 563w
Mentally disadvantaged 77w
Social security benefits rules 77w
Social security claims 298-306w, 561w
Wales 53w

Disability working allowance
Social security claims 305w

Disabled workers
Local government staff 312w
Training 739-40
Unemployment 621-2w
Wales 312w

Disciplinary proceedings
Doctors 330w
Hospital doctors 52w, 149w, 158w, 273w

Disclosure of information
British Nuclear Fuels 579w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 273w
Regional health authorities 445w

Discounts
Council tax 527-8w

Discretionary student grants
Wales 554w

Discrimination
Young offenders 553w

Disease control
AIDS 257-8w

Dismissal
Pregnant women 467w

Disposable income
Council tenants 335w
Fines 241w, 433w

District health authorities
Parliamentary questions 660-1w

Diving Disease Research Centre
Taxation 111w

Divorce
Children's rights 13-4

Dixon, Mr Don
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 110
Export promotion (21:05:93) 509

Dobson, Mr Frank
Questions
Redundancy 741
Unemployment, Press releases 526w

Dock labour scheme
654w

Dockyards
Nuclear safety 509w
Nuclear submarines (18:05:93) 211-22

Doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 330w

Dog licences
182w

Dogs
182w
Public petitions (17:05:93) 130

Dolphins
Nature conservation 177w

Domestic energy conservation
Scotland 585w

Domicil
Law reform 597w

Dorrell, Mr Stephen, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
British Telecom, Government shareholding 419-20w, 541w
Companies, Debts 106-7w
Corporation tax, Small businesses 283w
Diving Disease Research Centre, Taxation 111w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 336w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 418w
Income tax, Tax yields 664w

Dorrell, Mr Stephen—continued
Inland Revenue, Postal rates 419w
Inland Revenue, Scotland 15w
Mortgage relief 534w, 665-6w
Mortgage relief, Low incomes 419w
Mortgage relief, Members' correspondence 106w
Overseas investment, Personal income 572w
Overseas workers, Taxation 572w
Personal tax allowances 572w
Personal tax allowances, Widows 533-4w
Petroleum exploration, Tax allowances 537-8w
Petroleum revenue tax, Tax reform 419w
Petroleum revenue tax, Tax yields 15w
Profit sharing, Tax allowances 13w
Shares, Charities 107w
Tax allowances, Northern Ireland 664w
Tax allowances, Relocation of employees 572w
Tax allowances, Self-employed pensions 13w
Tax allowances, Vocational training 281w
Tax assessment 107-9w
Tax yields, Entertainers 283-4w
Taxation, British residents abroad 14-5w
Taxation, Members' visits abroad 571w
Taxation, Rugby 13-4w
Taxpayers, Income tax 573-4w
Treasury, Select Committee reports 417w
Withholding tax, Entertainers 573w

Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Parental contributions 272w
Bus stations, Scotland 215w
Cockburnspath bypass, Road accidents 588w
Cockburnspath bypass, Road safety 587-8w
Council house sales, Edinburgh District Council 269w
Crown Office for Scotland, Building repairs 212-3w
Election expenses, Scotland 735w
Forensic science, Scotland 734w
Further education colleges, Pay incentives 279-80w
Gilmour, Raymond, Criminal appeals 269-70w
Greenock Prison, Per capita costs 589w
Hedges & ditches, Scotland 352w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Further education colleges 734w
Housing improvement, Renfrew District Council 212w
Housing revenue accounts, Renfrew District Council 212w
Judges, Training 731w
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, Local government constituencies 133w
Paint ball guns, War games 37-8w
Party conferences, Security 733-4w
Playgrounds, Child safety 213-4w
Police, Scotland 584w
Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry, Scotland 588w
Railway stations, Handicapped 270w
Reparation by offenders, Scotland 271-2w
School attendance, Scotland 733w
Scottish courts 731-2w
Scottish courts, Convictions 499-500w
Scottish Homes 279w
Scottish Office Education Dept, Government grants 211-2w
Scottish Prison Service, Contracts for services 730w
Security equipment, Renfrew 214w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 585w
Sexual offences, Trials 448-9w
Skye bridge, Construction 38w, 273-4w
Solicitor-General for Scotland 729-30w
Speech impaired, Scotland 133w, 731w
Sports centres, Urban programme 735w
Student grants, Scotland 272w
Witnesses, Scotland 449w
Youth services, Paisley 214w

Dounreay
904

Dover, Mr Den
Questions
Family credit, Expenditure 323w

Dowd, Mr Jim
Questions
Bromley Borough Council, Fraud 179-80w
Cambodia, Overseas aid 103w
Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993 95w
Emergency planning, Warnings 204w, 566w
Magistrates' courts, Information 69w
NHS trusts, Expenditure 576w
Treaties, Mines 101w
Unemployment, Statistics 519w

Drama
Arts finance 15-7w
Scotland 15-7w

Drinking & driving
Convictions 425w

Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency
683-4w

Drivers' Vehicles & Operator's Information Technology
683-4w

Driving offences
Drugs 425w

Drug abuse
(18:05:93) 174-7
Community care 330w
Inner city areas 421-2w
Narcotics 336w
Research 508w, 670w
Schools 169w
Scottish health boards 274w
Wales 169w, 545w
Young people 477w, 566w, 579w, 720w

Drug crimes
Confiscation orders 239-40w, 719-20w
Crime prevention 417w
Customs & Excise 242w
Prison sentences 719w
Proceeds of crime 239-40w

Drug prevention schemes
421-2w

Drug rehabilitation centres
297w

Drug seizures
337-8w, 573w
EC countries 417-8w
Ecstacy 204-5w

Drug side effects
Diethylistilboestrol 506-8w
Triazolam 577w

Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 (Designated Countries & Territories) (Amendment) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584

Drugs
Driving offences 425w
Packaging 505w
Prices 336-8w

Drugs & crime
422w

Dry cleaning
Chlorofluorocarbons 287-8w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1963 (26:05:93) 1016-9
Questions
Defence Animal Centre 512w

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 317
Questions
Lambeth Borough Council, Local government corruption 750

Duncan Smith, Mr Iain—continued
Local government services, Contracts for services 364w

Dundee
Housing construction 39w

Dunn, Mr Bob
Questions
British Rail, Pension funds 235-6w
British Rail, Privatisation 411-2w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 412w
Civil service agencies, Privatisation 683-4w
Hospitals, Security 577-8w
Jubilee line 360
Marine Emergency Organisation 332w
Motorways, Road tolls 484w
Road haulage licences 684w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Public appointments 490w
Youth unemployment 518w

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
VAT, Energy prices 535w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 397, 442-3
Guatemala, Points of order (26:05:93) 940
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 595
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 789
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 143w
Armed forces training 144w
Armed forces training, Belize 229w
British Rail, Privatisation 88-9w
British Rail, Travel concessions 2w
Bus services, Contracts for services 2w
Business questions 374
Family planning, Northern Ireland 361
Housing associations 906
Low flying, Belize 143w
Low flying, Complaints 143-4w
Occupational pensions 139w
West Coast railway line, Employment opportunities 90w

Durant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 88-9, 109
Questions
Cancer, Young people 149-50w
Industrial injuries scheme, Self-employed 188w
Lambeth Borough Council 912

Durham County
Severe hardship provision 694-7w

Durham University
508w, 670w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 390, 419
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 787, 796, 802-4, 806, 863
Questions
Business questions 372

Dyslexia
Northern Ireland 292w
Teacher training 292w
Unruly children 401w

Eagle, Ms Angela
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 224w
Youth unemployment, Wallasey 742-3

Ear tagging
Sheep 718w

Early retirement
Pensions 637w

Earnings rules
Unemployment benefits 72w

Easington
Enterprise zones 617-8w

Easington colliery
692-3w

East Coast Main Line (Safety) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903

East Fortune Hospital
Geriatric patients 38w

East London
Railway network 332w

East London Rail Study
332w

East London river crossing
682w
Costs 571w
Environmental impact assessment 90-1w
Oxleas Wood 4w, 556-7

East Midlands
91-3w
Business start-up scheme 518-9w
Industrial investment 234
Manufacturing industries 234

East Timor
Human rights 102w
Overseas aid 104w

Eastern Europe
Nuclear safety 487w

Eastern Health & Social Services Board
687-9w
Public appointments 160w

Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee
EC grants & loans 594-5w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
Car industry, Foreign investment in UK 231-2
Employee reports 520w
Helicopter carriers, Marine engines 453-4w

EC action
Air pollution 178w
Air pollution control 177w
Carbon tax 487-8w
Computer privacy 204w
Insurance companies 230-1
Mass media (17:05:93) 129-30
Nuclear power stations (26:05:93) 1015
Nuclear safety 341w
Potatoes 171-2w
Slaughterhouses (24:05:93) 728
Youth employment (24:05:93) 728

EC advisory committees
Agriculture 542-3w

EC Agriculture Commissioner
327-8w

EC Agriculture Council
685-6w

EC Committee of the Regions
Wales 3-5

EC Cons Doc 7021/92
(24:05:93) 727-8

EC Cons Doc 4213/93
(17:05:93) 129-30

EC countries
Drug seizures 417-8w
EC grants & loans 580w
Employment level 743
Food poisoning 676w
Pensions 187w
Regional aid 347-8w

EC Development Council
Development aid 18w

EC Draft 9880/91
(24:05:93) 728

EC Draft 5378/92
(24:05:93) 728

EC Draft 10306/92
(24:05:93) 728

EC Draft 11096/92
(26:05:93) 1015

EC Draft 4769/93
(17:05:93) 130

EC enlargement
749-50

EC Environment Council
175w

EC external trade
225w

EC Finance Council
666-7w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
166-7w

EC grants & loans
369-70w
Ballyconnell Canal 459-60w
Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee 594-5w
EC countries 580w
Local authorities 472w
Textile industry 228-30
Wales 472w

EC Industry Council
118w, 288-9w
Voting behaviour 452w

EC institutions
Members' visits abroad 571w

EC internal relations
748-9

EC internal trade
Export of live animals 24w

EC law
Animal welfare 542w
Chlorofluorocarbons 366-7w
Coastal zone management 98-9w
Computer privacy 338w
Employment protection 463w
Environment protection 179w
Environmental impact assessment 354-5w
Incinerators 173w
Industrial health & safety 40w
Nuclear safeguards 348w
Package holidays 450w
Product safety 223w
Subsidiarity 750-1
Water pollution 176w, 290w, 354w

EC regional policy
Wales 50w

EC Social Charter
(20:05:93) 381-471

EC Telecommunications Council
489-90w

EC trade with developing countries
377w

Ecolabelling
908-10

Economic & monetary union
112w

Economic growth
Scotland 733w
Strathclyde 733w

Economic policy
Environment protection 666w
Greater London 417w

Economic situation
155w, 365-6, 368
Greece 516w
SubSaharan Africa 19w, 379w

Ecstacy
Death 338w
Drug seizures 204-5w

Edinburgh
212-3w, 215w

Edinburgh District Council
Council house sales 269w
Housing revenue accounts 269w

Edinburgh University Dental School
Departmental correspondence 214w

Education
Local government expenditure 466-8w
Wales 2-3, 466-8w

Education (Individual Pupils Achievements) (Information) (Wales) Regulations 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

Education (School Curriculum & Related Information) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

Educational assessment
167w, 246-7w, 491-2w
Advertising 23w
Costs 495w
Departmental publications 23w
Handicapped pupils 494-5w
Northern Ireland 159w
Science education 383w
Wales 314w

Educational finance
Legal education (27:05:93) 1095-102
Northern region 384-5w
Primary education (18:05:93) 193
Yorkshire & Humberside 384-5w

Educational health services
330-1w

Educational psychology
405w
Finance 404-5w
Manpower 405-7w

Educational qualifications
Navy 628-9w
Wales 328w

Educational standards
Class sizes 23w
Wales 8

***Eggar, Mr Tim**, Minister for Energy*
Debates etc.
Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1983 (26:05:93) 1019-22
Questions
Batteries, Recycling 583w
British Coal Corporation, Coal mine closures 692w
British Coal Corporation, Pension funds 223w, 450w, 583-4w
British Nuclear Fuels, Company finance 226w, 451w
British Nuclear Fuels, Disclosure of information 579w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution 286w
Carbon tax, EC action 487-8w
Coal consumption, Power stations 693w
Coal mine closures 223w
Coal mine closures, Government assistance 222-3w
Coal mining, Energy review 489w
Coal mining, Privatisation 488w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Civil service manpower 452w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Computer privacy 286-7w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Parliamentary questions 343-4w
Dry cleaning, Chlorofluorocarbons 287-8w
Electricity generation 223
Electricity generation, Coal 223-4
Electricity generation, Departmental publications 34w

***Eggar, Mr Tim**—continued*
Energy Advisory Panel, Public appointments 344w
Energy policy 233-4, 342w
Environmental management options scheme 226-7w
Environmental technology innovation scheme 286w
European Nuclear Safeguards Research Development Association, International conferences 286w
Gas pipelines, Europe 489w
Gas tariffs 490-1w
Incinerators, Belvedere 579w
Lead free petrol 35w
Mine service centres 229w
Nuclear reactors, Harmonisation of standards 487w
Nuclear safeguards, EC law 348w
Nuclear safety 486-7w
Nuclear safety, Eastern Europe 487w
Nuclear safety, EC action 341w
Petroleum exploration, Liverpool Bay 232-3
Plutonium, Japan 487w
Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association 286w
THORP, Licensing 225-6w
THORP, Sellafield 486w
Trawsfynydd power station, Plutonium 638w
Warren Spring Laboratory, Telephone services 342w

Eggs
Food labelling 242-3w

EH101 helicopters
Defence procurement 142w, 629w

Elder abuse
441w

Elderly
HIV infection 675w
Mental illness 193w
Venereal diseases 675w

Election expenses
Scotland 735w

Elections
Mozambique 48-9w

Electoral reform
366

Electoral register
Armed forces (26:05:93) 942
Northern Ireland (26:05:93) 942

Electorate
Manchester 509w
Trafford 509w

Electrical industry
Exports 221-2w

Electricity generation
223
Coal 223-4
Departmental publications 34w

Electricity tariffs
223

Electronic surveillance
Government Communications Headquarters (18:05:93) 169-70
Royal family 238w

Elletson, Mr Harold
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 514w, 516w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces 261w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace negotiations 574w
Croatia, Armed conflict 42-3w, 162-3w
Croatia, Armed forces deployment 164-5w
Croatia, Arms embargoes 513-4w
Croatia, Diplomatic relations 43w
Croatia, Diplomatic service 165w
Croatia, Human rights 513w
Croatia, Mercenaries 514w
Croatia, Official visits 163w

Elletson, Mr Harold—continued
Croatia, Overseas aid 348w
Croatia, Overseas investment 488w
Croatia, Peace keeping operations 163-4w
Croatia, Refugees 164w
Croatia, State visits 42w
Croatia, Visas 165w
Croatia, War crimes 162w
Greece, Economic situation 516w
Nagorno Karabakh, Peace negotiations 514-5w
Serbia, Refugees 251w
Serbia, Sanctions 44w
Tourists, Stratford-on-Avon 478w
Triazolam, Drug side effects 577w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 162w, 517w
Yugoslavia, Mercenaries 517w
Yugoslavia, Peace keeping operations 369w

Emergency planning
Fire engines 62w
Government grants to local authorities 63-5w
Netherlands 204w
Warnings 204w, 566w

Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 447-9
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 932
Questions
Rented housing, Rural areas 907-8

Employee reports
520w

Employment
464w, (25:05:93) 755-7
Wales 329w, 466w

Employment action
217-8w, 315-22w, 350-2w

Employment by sector
Renfrew 730w

Employment discrimination
Northern Ireland 296w

Employment level
216w, 743-4
EC countries 743
Enterprise zones 127-8w
Manufacturing industries 522w
Mid Glamorgan 49w

Employment opportunities
525w
Career development loan scheme 217w
Cooperatives 132w
Enterprise zones 529w
Northern region 33-4w
Regional selective assistance 646-7w
Scotland 33-4w
Small businesses 238-9
West Coast railway line 90w

Employment protection
520w, 524w, 914-5
Contracts for services 97w, 209w, 241w
EC law 463w
Industrial disputes 738
Local government staff 914
NHS trusts 716w
Pregnant women 321w

Employment schemes
217-8w, 519w
Industrial accidents 315-22w
Scotland 350-2w
Wales 646w

Employment Service
738

Employment Service Agency
217w

Employment Service local offices
Ilford 523-4w
Pay incentives 523-4w

Employment training
217-8w, 315-22w, 350-2w

Empty housing
609-10w, 912
Council housing 911-3
House purchase 534-5w
Repairs & maintenance 618-9w
Wales 708w

Empty property
Defence review 510w
Government buildings 912-3

Energy Advisory Panel
Public appointments 344w

Energy Efficiency Office
532w

Energy management assistance scheme
617w

Energy policy
233-4, 342w

Energy prices
Northern Ireland 354-5
VAT (18:05:93) 188-90, 535w

Energy research
Combined heat & power 532w

Energy review
Coal mining 489w

"Energy Use & Energy Efficiency in UK Manufacturing Industry up to the Year 2000"
529w

Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council
(26:05:93) 923-37

Engineering education
Navy 628w

English education
Curriculum 380-1w

English Heritage
see Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England

Enright, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Assisted areas, Wakefield (25:05:93) 897-8
Questions
Clergy, Tied housing 71w

Enterprise allowance scheme
217-8w
Wales 710w

Enterprise initiative
221w, 288w

Enterprise training
524-5w

Enterprise zones
Easington 617-8w
Employment level 127-8w
Employment opportunities 529w
Mansfield 702w

Entertainers
Tax yields 283-4w
Withholding tax 573w

Environment Agency
531-2w

Environment health officers
697-8w

Environment protection
611w
Agriculture 53w, 543-5w
Association of County Councils 528w
Children 366w
Civil liability 225w
EC law 179w
Economic policy 666w
Government achievements 619w
India 357w
International cooperation 179w

Environment protection—continued
National Council for Voluntary Organisations 365w
Orders & regulations 619w
Scotland 216w
Tourism 135w
Transport policy 415-6w

Environmental health
Water supply disconnections 697-8w

Environmental impact assessment
East London river crossing 90-1w
EC law 354-5w
Offices 526-7w

Environmental management options scheme
226-7w, 286w

Environmental policy
531-2w
Government departments 501-2w

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
216w
Disclosure of information 273w
Prosecutions 175w
Publicity 175w
Scotland 273w

Environmental research
Government laboratories 690w
Non-ionizing radiation 176w

Environmental technology innovation scheme
286w

Environmentally sensitive areas
Public access 596w

Equal opportunities
Crown Prosecution Service 567
Legal profession 657w

Equipment
Road safety 555-6
Road traffic control 555-6

Erskine Bridge
Transport of radioactive materials 455w

Esso Petroleum
(19:05:93) 342-50

Estate Action
917-8
Yorkshire & Humberside 917

Etherington, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
VAT, Energy prices (18:05:93) 188-90

Ethnic cleansing
514w

Ethnic groups
Unemployment 313w

Ethnic minorities
Government grants to local authorities (25:05:93) 893
Magistrates 69w
Prison staff 66-7w
Radio broadcasting licences 124w
Small businesses 610w

EURATOM
341w

Europe
710w
Gas pipelines 489w

European Armaments Agency
678w

European Commission
90-1w, 461-2w

European Committee for the Prevention of Torture
659w

European Communities (Amendment) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
3R (20:05:93) 381-471

European Communities (Amendment) Bill 1992/93—continued
Questions
372-3

European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Agreement on Customs Union & Cooperation between the European Economic Community & the Republic of San
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583-4

European Convention on Human Rights
346-7w, (27:05:93) 1024-34
Council of Europe 370w
Judgments 370w

European Court of Human Rights
Administrative delays 370-1w

European Economic Community
Fishery agreements (17:05:93) 130

European fighter aircraft
Defence procurement 139-40, 144

European Nuclear Safeguards Research Development Association
International conferences 286w

European Parliament
(20:05:93) 381-471

European Parliament constituencies
567w, 724w

European Parliament elections
368w

European Parliament members
Pensions 161-2w

European Parliament (Pay & Pensions) Act 1979
Questions
161-2w

European Regional Development Fund
369-70w

European Security Conference
165w

European Social Fund
Training 622w

Evans, Mr David
Questions
Arms exports, Government assistance 146
Cars, Exports 231
Unemployment 746

Evans, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 951, 962, 975-9, 992
Questions
Brecon Beacons National Park 647w
Radon gas, Health hazards 711w
Rural planning, Wales 50-1w
Seals, Nature conservation 689w
Solicitors, Rights of audience 17-8
Wind power, Wales 6

Evans, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 278, 281
Questions
BBC External Services 254w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Military aircraft 141w
Car tax, Tax yields 418-9w
Corporation tax, Small businesses 283w
Criminal Justice Bill (HL) 1992/93, Prison accommodation 422w
Drinking & driving, Convictions 425w
Drug abuse, Inner city areas 421-2w
Fire services, Manpower 423-4w
Football, Arrests 474w
General certificate of secondary education 385-6w
Government grants to local authorities, Local government expenditure 616-7w
Grant maintained schools 245-6w
Income support, Pensioners 631-2w

Evans, Mr Nigel—continued
Integrated administration & control system 542w
Lead free petrol 35w
Loan guarantee scheme 450w
Local government staff 358w
M6, Planning compensation 4w
Motor vehicle theft 65w
Palace of Westminster, Telephones 651w
Petroleum revenue tax, Tax yields 15w
Pornography, Prosecutions 425w
Public transport 414-5w
Rape, Young offenders 66w
Social security payments, Post offices 631w
Telecommunications industry, UK companies abroad 450-1w
Television licences, Tax evasion 66w
Tobacco duties, Tax yields 283w

Evans, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 487-8
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 989-91
Questions
Cereals, Agricultural production 714w
Fishing vessels, Decommissioning 594w
Flats over shops initiative 57w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 713w
Student numbers, Wales 2

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
East London river crossing 682w
Incinerators, Belvedere 579w
Local government services, Contracts for services 609w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial training 737
Medical research, Primary health care 506w
Road safety, Equipment 555-6

Everyman Theatre Liverpool
Arts finance 125-6w

Evidence
Police 425-6w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 828-30, 835, 847-9
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 575

Ex gratia payments
61-2w

Exchange rate mechanism
110w

Exchange rates
110-1w, 161w, 281-2w, 334w, 420-1w
Industrial production 110w
Sterling 421w

Exhaust emission controls
Carbon dioxide 415-6w

Exhibitions
Navy 510-1w
Upper Waiting Hall 170w, 380w

"Export Control Compliance"
342w

Export controls
Codes of practice 342w

Export Credits Guarantee Department
(21:05:93) 481-540
Manpower 237-8

Export Group for the Constructional Industries
375w

Export of live animals
BC internal trade 24w
Zoos 364w

Export promotion
222w
Government assistance 236-7, (21:05:93) 481-540

Exports
224
Aerospace industry 117-8w
British Gas 236
Cars 231-2
Electrical industry 221-2w
Ford Motor Company 232
Wales 710w

EXPRA
230w

Exservicemen
Nuclear weapons tests 364

Extortion
Northern Ireland 289w
Prosecutions 289w

Extradition
Bail 564-5
Cyprus 565

Eye disorders
Health surveys 257w

Eye tests
145-6w
Wales 311w

Faber, Mr David
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 345w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, International aid from international bodies 251w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Military aircraft 344-5w, 371-2w, 624w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Overseas aid 377-8w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace keeping operations 373w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace negotiations 371-2w
Croatia, Armed conflict 164w
Croatia, Armed forces deployment 164w
Croatia, Armed forces uniforms 344w
Croatia, Arms embargoes 164w
Croatia, Refugees 163w
Croatia, Sanctions 163w
Serbia, Sanctions 373w
UN Security Council, USA 373-4w
USA, Military intervention 163w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 252w
Yugoslavia, Peace keeping operations 372w
Yugoslavia, Refugees 378w
Yugoslavia, Sanctions 372w

Fabricant, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 490, 494-5, 509-13, 528
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 968-71, 976-7
Questions
British Columbia, Wales 50w
EC law, Subsidiarity 750-1
Magistrates' courts, Rugeley 61w
Overseas trade, Russia 236
Russia, Overseas aid 375w
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 363

Factories
Fires 65w

Fair Isle straits
85-6w

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Questions
Sub post offices, Social security payments 37w

Falkland Islands
Armed forces deployment 150
Military discipline 234w
War crimes 266w

Family credit
Expenditure 323w

Family doctors
Pharmacies 467-8w
Scotland 496-7w
Surgery 496-7w

Family health services authorities
Dentists 470-1w
Finance 26w

Family income
Nottinghamshire 284w
Tax burden 284-5w

Family Law (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 130

Family Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 130

Family planning
576w
China 20-1w, 44w
Developing countries 590w
Non-governmental organisations 590-2w
Northern Ireland 361
Overseas aid 252w

Family planning clinics
RU486 445w

Family practitioner services
Scotland 270-1w

Fares
Network SouthEast 553-4

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 331-4
Export promotion (21:05:93) 487-95, 534
Questions
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 453w
Assisted areas 35-6w
Enterprise initiative 288w
Rolls-Royce, Defence research 144w
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Government assistance 452-3w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 230
Training & enterprise councils, Small businesses 288w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 578

Feltham Young Offenders' Institution & Remand Centre
426w

Fertility
Gloucestershire District Health Authority 444w
Medical treatments 578w, 668w

Festivals & special occasions
Liverpool 230w
World War II 230w

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Whales (17:05:93) 24-5
Questions
Bass, Fish conservation 363w
Council tax benefits 636w
Storms, Norfolk 60w

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Full Employment (Commission) Bill, 1R (25:05:93) 755-7
Questions
Council tax, Transitional arrangements 367w
Invalidity benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 75w
Invalidity benefits, Social security benefits rules 76-7w
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, Self-regulating organisations 539-41w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 324-5w
Social security benefits, Performance standards 632-4w
Social security benefits, Sex discrimination 73-6w

Field, Mr Frank—continued
Social security recipients 556w
State earnings related pension scheme, Social security recipients 323-4w
Youth training 132w

Finance & Services Select Committee
484w

Financial markets
Self-regulatory system 333-4w

Financial services
Investor protection 539-41w

Financial Services Act 1986
Questions
539-41w

Fine defaulters
Prison sentences 341w

Fines
65w, 209-10w, 339-40w, 428w, 474w, 567w, 719w
Disposable income 241w, 433w

Fire Advisory Panel
Public appointments 699w

Fire engines
475-6w
Emergency planning 62w

Fire hazards
Public footpaths (26:05:93) 943-8

Fire prevention
Northern Ireland 460-1w
Royal residences 600w

Fire regulations
699w
Northern Ireland 462-3w
Palace of Westminster 171w
Royal residences 124-5w

Fire services
(27:05:93) 1064-71
Manpower 423-4w
Marchington 475-6w
Pay 475w

Fire Services Act 1947
Debates etc.
(27:05:93) 1064-71

Fire Services Benevolent Fund
Scotland 727-8w

Firearms certificates
93w

Fires
Factories 65w

First aid
Curriculum 402-3w

Fish conservation
Bass 363w

Fisheries
Civil service manpower 362-3w, 470w

Fishery agreements
Argentina (17:05:93) 130
European Economic Community (17:05:93) 130

Fishery decommissioning scheme
594w

Fishing
Wales 8-9

Fishing vessels
Decommissioning 594w

Flags
Northern Ireland 325w

Flats over shops initiative
57w

Flood defence committees
Public appointments 362w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 933
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 968, 970
Whales (17:05:93) 25-6
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security claims 298-306w
Church property, Rents 12-3
Coastal zone management, EC law 98-9w
Defence estimates, House of Commons debates 454w
Disability appeal tribunals, Disability living allowance 563w
NATO, Armed forces strength 454-6w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Russia 454w
Nuclear weapons policy 454w
Office of Public Service & Science, Contracts for services 363-4w
Parliamentary questions, Civil service agencies 72-3w, 651w
Redundancy, Gwent 555w
TASM 454w
Trident 455w
Water treatment, Wales 711w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 454w
Welsh Office, Contracts for services 555w
Working hours, Wales 11

Food Advisory Committee
24w

Food contamination
Food packaging 151w

Food industry
Scotland 728w
Strathclyde 728w

Food labelling
Eggs 242-3w
Genetically modified organisms 24w

Food packaging
Food contamination 151w

Food poisoning
259w, 676w
EC countries 676w
Northern Ireland 688w

Football
Arrests 474w

Football Trust
(17:05:93) 29-70

Ford Motor Company
Exports 232

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
(21:05:93) 481-540
Computer privacy 101-2w
Parliamentary questions 48w
Select Committee reports 349w, 515w

Foreign companies in UK
Industrial research 224-5w
Manpower 552w
Wales 552w

Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
Rep* & 3R (18:05:93) 205-10
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

Foreign Compensation Commission
(18:05:93) 205-10

Foreign investment in UK
Advertising 121w
Car industry 231-2
Wales 548-50w

Foreign policy
RENAMO 48w
Turkey 514w

Forensic science
Scotland 734w

Forensic Science Service
210w

Forest Moor
Naval bases 681w
Repairs & maintenance 681w

Forestry
Scotland 733w

Forestry Commisaion
584w, 736-7w
Land acquisition 584w
Land ownership & tenure 351w, 736w
Nature conservation 737-8w
Privatisation 336w

Forests
Access to countryside 584w, 736w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 460
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 934-5
Questions
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 561-2

Former Ministers
Autobiography 566

Forsyth, Mr Michael, Minister of State for Employment
Questions
Building workers, Germany 41w
Business start-up scheme, East Midlands 518-9w
Business start-up scheme, North West region 518w
Contracts of employment 655w
Dept of Employment, Government buildings 655-6w
Disabled workers, Training 740
Employee reports 520w
Employment protection 520w, 524w
Employment protection, EC law 463w
Employment protection, Pregnant women 321w
Employment Service local offices, Pay incentives 523-4w
European Social Fund, Training 622w
Industrial health & safety, Orders & regulations 621w
Investors in people 737-8
Lost working days, Industrial disputes 517w
Manufacturing industries, Industrial training 737
Offshore safety, Enforcement 622-3w
Training, South East region 737
Training, Young people 740-1, 744-5
Training credits 747
Training credits, Take-up 746-7
Unfair dismissal, Pregnant women 249w
Wages councils 523w, 736-7
Youth unemployment 132-4w, 518w, 739-40
Youth unemployment, Cheshire 740

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Questions
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1992 599w

Forth, Mr Eric, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Parental contributions 602w
City technology colleges, Land acquisition 652w
Class sizes, Educational standards 23w
Computers in schools 105w
Curriculum, Poetry 495w
Dept for Education, Select Committee reports 22w
Dyslexia, Unruly children 401w
Educational assessment 167w, 246-7w, 491-2w
Educational assessment, Costs 495w
Educational assessment, Departmental publications 23w
Educational finance, Yorkshire & Humberside 384-5w
Educational psychology 405w

Forth, Mr Eric—continued
Educational psychology, Finance 404-5w
Educational psychology, Manpower 405-7w
English education, Curriculum 380-1w
First aid, Curriculum 402-3w
General certificate of secondary education 383w, 385-6w
Grant maintained schools 245-6w
Grant maintained schools, Accounting 246w
Grant maintained schools, Capital investment 383-4w
Grant maintained schools, Government grants 386-402w
Grant maintained schools, Handicapped pupils 383w
Grants for education support & training 403-4w
Handicapped pupils, Educational assessment 494-5w
Handicapped pupils, Teacher training 24w
"How is Your Child Doing at School" 601-2w
Nursery schools, Greater London 381-4w
Play groups, Government grants 22-3w
Pupil exclusions 606w
Pupil exclusions, Special education 607w
School Examinations & Assessment Council, Resignations 247-8w
Schools, Inspections 168w, 607w
Schools, Intimidation 106w
Science education, Educational assessment 383w
Special education 105-6w
Special education, Curriculum 608w
Special education, Hearing aids 167-8w
Special education, School population 22w
Special schools 607-8w
Special schools, School closures 601-6w
"Testing: The Facts" 168-9w, 333w, 601w
Unruly children 407w

Forth Ports plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(17:05:93) 28

Forward look
(26:05:93) 923-37

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 928
Questions
Human rights, International conferences 575w
Narmada dam 592w
Naval Support Command 266w
United Nations, Human rights 574-5w

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 254
Fisheries, Points of order (26:05:93) 940
Fisheries, Points of order (25:05:93) 874
Questions
EH101 helicopters, Defence procurement 629w
Navy, Educational qualifications 628-9w
Navy, Engineering education 628w
River Clyde, Submarines 86w
Royal Military College of Science 629w
Royal Naval Engineering College 628w
Water supply industry, Scotland 366

Foundation for Sport & the Arts
(17:05:93) 29-70

Fox, Dr Liam
Questions
Building workers, Germany 41w
Business questions 375-6

Fox hunting
Wales 312w

France
166w, 374w
Strawberries 243w

Franchising
Radio Authority 124w

Fraser, Mr John
Questions
Council tax, Transitional arrangements 910
Immigration, Advisory services 718w
Nadir, Asil, Bail 565
Refuse disposal, Lambeth 365-6w
Youth employment, Lambeth 520-1w

Fraud
Bromley Borough Council 179-80w
Cellular phones 225-6

Free school meals
Wales 706w

Freedom of expression
Health service staff 577w

Freeman, Mr Roger, Minister for Public Transport
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 650-2, 677-9, 685-6, 697-9, 713-5, 720-1, 726-7
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 813-5, 821-3, 832-5, 840-3, 846, 854, 859, 869
Questions
British Rail, Accountability 682w
British Rail, Pension funds 570w
British Rail, Privatisation 88-9w, 410-2w
British Rail, Travel concessions 2w, 407w
Bus services, Competition 562-4
Bus services, Contracts for services 2w
Buses 1w, 87w
Central line, Railway closures 86w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 412w, 569w
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 561-2
Concessionary fares, Railway travel 562
Director of Passenger Rail Franchising, York 411w
Level crossings, Accidents 86w
Network SouthEast, Railway travel 555
Public transport 414-5w
Railway electrification, Northern region 85w
Railway fares 87-8w
Railway freight transport 411w
Railway freight transport, Transport of radioactive materials 332w
Railway network, Nottinghamshire 2w, 414w
Railway stations, Ashford 410w
Railway track, Vandalism 685w
Railway travel 408w
Railway travel, Commuters 553-4
Railway travel, Greater London 554
Railway travel, Liverpool 89w
Railway travel, South East region 554
Red Star, Privatisation 409w
Roads, Greater London 555
Rolling stock, Leaseback arrangements 410w
Transport, Planning permission 237w
West Coast railway line, Employment opportunities 90w
West Coast railway line, Railway maintenance 408w
West Coast railway line, Railway travel 408w

Freight transport
Wastes 87w

French, Mr Douglas
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 497, 503-9, 537
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 140-1w
Insurance companies, Company accounts 230-1
Transport, South East region 409w

Fryer, Gary
Death 261-2w, 624w

Fuels
VAT 281w

Full Employment (Commission) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
1R (25:05:93) 755-7

Further education
Citizen's Charter 248w
Handicapped students 492w

Further education colleges
HM Inspectorate of Schools 734w
Pay incentives 279-80w
Scotland 279-80w
Wales 9

Further Education Funding Council for England
167-8w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Questions
Acute beds, Scotland 36w
Domestic energy conservation, Scotland 585w
Family practitioner services, Scotland 270-1w
GP fundholders, Scotland 350w
Health service staff, Scotland 37w
Judges, Training 731w
NHS trusts, Managers 37w
Nurses' training, Psychiatric nurses 36w
Nurses' training, Scotland 36-7w
Sexual offences, Sentencing 585w
Sexual offences, Trials 448-9w
Wages councils 736

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 934
Questions
Dept of Employment, Civil servants 217w
Industrial health & safety, Hazardous materials 217w
Wages councils 736-7

Gale, Mr Roger
Questions
Birds, Import of live animals 172w

Gallie, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 308
Prestwick Airport, Immigration controls (27:05:93) 1072-6
Questions
Business questions 374
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland 496w
Prison escapes 919
Trident submarines, Repairs & maintenance 143

Galloway, Mr George
Questions
HIV infection, Health education 27w
Whooping cough, Vaccination 191-2w
Zidovudine, Clinical trials 579w

Gambling
Expenditure 197w

Gamete intrafallopian transfer treatment
444-5w

Gapes, Mr Mike
Questions
Builth Wells bypass 469w
Centre for Urban Policy Studies, Deprivation indicators 58-9w
Class sizes, Educational standards 23w
Diplomatic relations, Ministers' visits abroad 41w
Employment Service local offices, Pay incentives 523-4w
Fines 474w
Judiciary, Training 656w
Local government staff, Redbridge 615w
Magistrates' courts, Redbridge 723w
Northern Ireland government 290w
Official visits, Cyprus 157w
Road accidents, Builth Wells 470w
Road accidents, Injuries 568w
Road traffic, Builth Wells 469w
Sleeping rough, Outer London boroughs 701w

Garages & petrol stations
Petrol (19:05:93) 342-50

Gardiner, Sir George
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 440-2

Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace keeping operations 253w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace negotiations 574w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 515w
Croatia, Armed conflict 162-4w
Croatia, Armed forces deployment 164-5w
Croatia, Arms embargoes 164w
Croatia, Diplomatic service 165w
Croatia, Human rights 252-4w
Croatia, Official visits 163w
Croatia, Peace keeping operations 163-4w
Croatia, Refugees 163-4w
Croatia, Sanctions 163w
Croatia, War crimes 162w
Cyprus, Trade barriers 46w
France, Strawberries 243w
Gibraltar, Debts 102w
Greece, Economic situation 516w
St Helena, Official visits 516w
Treaties, Mines 101w
Turkey, Foreign policy 514w
USA, Military intervention 163w
Western European Union, Greece 102w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 162w, 252w

Garnier, Mr Edward
Questions
Adjutant-General Corps, Relocation of employees 145

Gas (Exempt Supplies) Act 1993
Debates etc.
(26:05:93) 1016-22

Gas pipelines
Europe 489w

Gas safety
Liquefied petroleum gas (26:05:93) 1016-22

Gas tariffs
490-1w

GATT
223-4w
Clothing industry 229-30

Gatwick Airport
685w

GEC
344w

Gene Therapy Advisory Committee
440-1w

General certificate of secondary education
383w, 385-6w

Genetic engineering
193w
Patents 227-8w

Genetically modified organisms
266-8w
Defence research 81-2w
Food labelling 24w
Licensing 39-40w

Genetics
Animal experiments 216-7w

Geographical information systems
543w
Computers in government departments 617w

George, Mr Bruce
Questions
Dockyards, Nuclear safety 509w
Nuclear submarines, Shipbuilding 509w

Georgia
Human rights 517w

Geriatric patients
East Fortune Hospital 38w

German measles
505w

Germany
Building workers 41w
Packaging 118w

Germany—continued
Water pollution 179w

Gerrard, Mr Neil
Questions
London Buses, Privatisation 409w
Racial attacks 473w
Training, South East region 737

Gibraltar
Debts 102w

Gilbert, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Points of order (26:05:93) 939-40

Gill, Mr Christopher
Questions
European Security Conference 165w
Sheep premiums 595w

Gilmour, Raymond
Criminal appeals 269-70w

Glasgow
215w, 346w
Inner city areas 271w

Glasgow Airport
(27:05:93) 1072-8

Glass
Recycling 706w
Standards specifications 700w, 722w

Glaxo
Warren Spring Laboratory 342w

Global environmental facility
589w

Gloucestershire
Council tax capping 613-4w

Gloucestershire District Health Authority
Fertility 444w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Questions
Army, Scotland 149-50
Cervical cancer, Screening 449-50w
Greenock Prison, Per capita costs 589w
Heathrow Airport, Railway travel 558
Northern Ireland government 289-90w
Nurses, Career structure 498w
Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry, Scotland 588w
Scottish councils, Contracts for services 588w
Scottish courts, Convictions 499-500w
Scottish health boards, Contracts for services 449w
Social security appeals, Scotland 459w
Travel agents, Insolvency 226

Godsiff, Mr Roger
Questions
ROF Birtley, Ammunition 80w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Questions
Child Support Act 1991, Tribunals 297w
Coal mine closures 223w

Goode Committee
see Pension Law Review Committee

Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Questions
British embassies, Construction 375w
Cambodia, Human rights 45-6w
Cambodia, Peace negotiations 46w
China, Family planning 44w
China, Human rights 516w
China, Infanticide 44w
China, Sanctions 43w
Diplomatic service, Manpower 374w
East Timor, Human rights 102w
European Security Conference 165w
Indonesia, Human rights 515w
Tibet, China 659-60w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Questions
Official Report, CD-ROM 380w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Questions
Trade barriers 151-2

Gorst, Mr John
Questions
Defence Postal & Courier Services, Performance standards 623w

Government achievements
249w
Environment protection 619w

Government buildings
Access to buildings 734w
Dept of Employment 655-6w
Dept of Social Security 694w
Dept of the Environment 702w
Dept of Trade & Industry 615w
Empty property 912-3
Home Office 725w
Repairs & maintenance 615w

Government Communications Headquarters
Electronic surveillance (18:05:93) 169-70
Trade unions (18:05:93) 169-70

Government departments
Administrative costs 664-5w
Environmental policy 501-2w

Government grants to local authorities
705w, 915-6
Civil defence 98w
Emergency planning 63-5w
Ethnic minorities (25:05:93) 893
Hackney 915
Local government expenditure 616-7w
Public petitions (25:05:93) 893
Wales 648w
Wandsworth 915

Government grants to voluntary organisations
211w
AIDS 258w
HIV infection 258w
Wales 10

Government laboratories
Environmental research 690w

Government shareholding
British Telecom 419-20w, 541w
International Military Services 418w, 677w

Gower
Bomb disposal 679w

GP fundholders
255w
Scotland 350w

Graduates
Unemployment 131-2w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 255, 261
Questions
Training credits, Take-up 746-7
Transport of radioactive materials, Erskine Bridge 455w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 575

Grant maintained schools
245-6w
Accounting 246w
Banw Primary School 650w
Capital investment 383-4w
Government grants 386-402w
Handicapped pupils 383-4w, 545w
Llanerfyl Primary School 650w
Wales 49w, 545w

Grantham & Kesteven General Hospital
669-70w

Grants for education support & training
403-4w

Gravesham
Railway network (18:05:93) 185-8
Retirement pensions (18:05:93) 185-8

Greater London
12, 249w, 332w, 367, 442w, (21:05:93) 541-52, 622w, 701w, 915
Air pollution 610w
Assisted areas 367-8
Bail hostels 566w
Bus services 1-2w, 562-3
Economic policy 417w
Listed buildings 697w
Magistrates 69w
Nursery schools 381-4w
Probation hostels 566w
Public transport (27:05:93) 1079-86
Railway network 416w
Railway travel 554
Road traffic 408-9w
Roads 555, 569w
Taxis 2-3w
Transport supplementary grants 91-2w
Travel cards 571w

Greater Manchester
442w

Greece
203-4w
Economic situation 516w
Western European Union 102w

Greenford
Road closures 569w

Greenock Prison
Per capita costs 589w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1055-6, 1062-3
Sports (17:05:93) 29
Whales (17:05:93) 23-4
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Yugoslavia 144w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 578
Business questions 376-7
Crossrail 367
Developing countries, Road construction 379w
Employment opportunities 525w
Firearms certificates 93w
Food labelling, Genetically modified organisms 24w
Housing associations 906
Housing associations, Land acquisition 57-8w
Manufacturing industries 238-9
Official engagements 122w, 502w
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 357w
Patents, Genetic engineering 227-8w
Religious education, Northern Ireland 291-2w
Road closures, Greenford 569w
Travel cards, Greater London 571w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 719

Greenwich
Unemployment 519w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Questions
British Telecom, Government shareholding 419-20w, 541w
Railway travel 408w
Travel agents, Insolvency 227

Griffiths, Mr Peter
Questions
Vice squads 60-1w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 950, 962, 975, 986-7, 1003-4
Questions
Assisted areas, Bridgend 713w
Assisted areas, Wales 713w
Educational assessment 246-7w

Griffiths, Mr Win—continued
Educational assessment, Wales 314w
Employment level, Enterprise zones 127-8w
English education, Curriculum 380-1w
Enterprise zones, Employment opportunities 529w
Grant maintained schools, Capital investment 383-4w
Grant maintained schools, Government grants 386-402w
Grant maintained schools, Handicapped pupils 383w, 545w
Grants for education support & training 403-4w
Hearing aids, Children 160w, 170w
"How is Your Child Doing at School" 601-2w
Local government reform, Vale of Glamorgan 50w
NHS, Land values 707w
School Examinations & Assessment Council, Resignations 247-8w
Science education, Educational assessment 383w
Special education, Curriculum 608w, 643-4w
Special education, Hearing aids 167-8w
Special schools 607-8w
Special schools, School closures 601-6w, 641-3w
Unruly children, Schools 553w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Members' conduct, Points of order (25:05:93) 754
Questions
Youth training 735

Group 4 Securitas
205-6w
Company registration 120w
Prisoner escorts 68w, 91-3w

Guaranteed prices
Wool (25:05:93) 875-92

Guardian & Manchester Evening News
691w

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Whales, Ministerial statements (17:05:93) 19-28
Questions
EC Agriculture Council 685-6w
Integrated administration & control system 172-3w, 542w
Medicines Commission, Bovine somatotropin 114w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Science & technology policy 596-7w

Gunnell, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 662-4, 696, 717
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 840-1
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 935
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 144-5
Batteries, Recycling 583w

Gwent
Redundancy 555w

Gwynedd
Dental services 134w

Gynaecology
Hospital consultants 38w

Hackney
Government grants to local authorities 915

Hague, Mr William
Questions
Local government services, Competition 355w
Peace keeping operations, Armed forces deployment 149

Hain, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 263, 281, 289
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 956, 958, 991-3, 1011
Questions
Disability living allowance, Wales 53w
Industrial injuries scheme, Social security recipients 56w
Invalidity benefits, Social security recipients 56-7w
Northern Ireland government 290w
Pensions, Social security payments 185-7w
Post offices, Social security payments 228w
Technology transfer, Expenditure 228w
Unemployed, Scotland 497w
Unemployment 526w
Unemployment, Men 465w
Unemployment, Wales 55-6w, 329w

Hall, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Garages & petrol stations (19:05:93) 345-6
Questions
Air safety, Baggage allowances 1w
Disabled workers, Training 739
Housing benefits, Warrington 139-40w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie, Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Questions
Adjutant-General Corps, Relocation of employees 145, 346w
Armed conflict, Bosnia-Herzegovina 345w
Armed forces, Asbestosis 84w
Armed forces, Bosnia-Herzegovina 261w
Armed forces, Development areas 143w
Armed forces dependants 625w
Armed forces deployment, Air transport 345w
Armed forces deployment, Belize 143w, 144-6
Armed forces deployment, Bosnia-Herzegovina 140-1w, 150-1
Armed forces deployment, Croatia 511w
Armed forces deployment, Falkland Islands 150
Armed forces deployment, Yugoslavia 144w
Armed forces housing 142w
Armed forces training 144w, 679-80w
Armed forces training, Belize 229w
Armed forces uniforms, Croatia 344w
Army 80w
Army, Armed forces strength 346w
Army, Scotland 149-50
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces casualties 625w
BAOR, Advisory services 455w
BAOR, Army strength 624w
Biological weapons, Arms control 82w
Bomb disposal, Gower 679w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 84w
Cruise missiles, Ukraine 262w
Defence Animal Centre 512w
Defence equipment, Sea transport 510w
Defence estimates, House of Commons debates 454w
Defence expenditure 142, 142w
Defence land 680w
Defence Postal & Courier Services, Performance standards 623w
Defence research, Genetically modified organisms 81-2w
Defence review 141-2
Defence review, Armed forces reserves 142-3
Defence review, Empty property 510w
Defence review, Submarines 142
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 680w
Forest Moor, Naval bases 681w
Forest Moor, Repairs & maintenance 681w
Fryer, Gary, Death 261-2w, 624w
Genetically modified organisms 266-8w
Helicopter carriers, Defence contracts 143-4
Helicopters, Military aid to civil community 142w
HMS Avenger, Chile 345w
Hydrographic Office, Performance standards 623w
Low flying, Belize 143w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie—continued
Low flying, Complaints 143-4w
Low flying, South Yorkshire 624w
Menwith Hill, Defence land 681w
Military aircraft, Bosnia-Herzegovina 84w, 141w, 344-5w, 624w, 681w
Minesweepers 623w
Ministry of Defence, Parliamentary questions 83-4w
NATO, Armed forces strength 454-6w
Naval Support Command 266w
Navy, Educational qualifications 628-9w
Navy, Engineering education 628w
Navy strength 143
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, UK delegations 230w, 678-9w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 81w, 230w
Nuclear weapons deployment, Russia 454w
Nuclear weapons policy 146-7, 454w
Peace keeping operations, Armed forces deployment 149
Peace keeping operations, UK contributions 141w
Polaris, Operating costs 79-80w
Publications 83w
RAF Biggin Hill, Armed forces housing 231w
Rapid reaction corps 141w
Rosyth Dockyard, Minesweepers 144w
Royal Military College of Science 629w
Royal Naval Engineering College 513w, 628w
Strategic defence initiative 147
Submarines 625w
TASM 147
Transport of radioactive materials, Erskine Bridge 455w
Trident 455w
Trident, Operating costs 81w
Trident missiles 147
Trident submarines, Repairs & maintenance 143
UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission, Armed forces casualties 625w
UN Operation in Somalia 142w
War crimes, Falkland Islands 266w
Warships, Marine fuels 346w
WE 177 nuclear bomb 454w
Western European Union, Defence expenditure 79-81w
Western European Union, UK contributions 81w
World War II, Festivals & special occasions 230w

Hamilton, Mr Neil, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs
Debates etc.
Assisted areas, Wakefield (25:05:93) 898-902
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Company liquidations 116w
Brewing industry 691-2w
British Airways, Competition 579-80w
Company disclosure of information, Shareholders 224w
Company finance 451w
Dan Air, Takeovers 580w
Deregulation initiative, Civil service unions 240
Directors, Disqualifications 116w
Directors, Honours 225w
Group 4 Securitas, Company registration 120w
Ice cream, Monopolies 120-1w
Insurance companies, Company accounts 230-1
National Weights & Measures Laboratory, Privatisation 690w

Hampshire
Youth unemployment 742

Handicap benefits
Administrative delays 562-4w
Compensation 562w

Handicapped
Advisory bodies 734w
Community care 506w

Handicapped—continued
Railway stations 270w
Scotland 734w
Social security benefits 556w

Handicapped children
Negligence 170w, 194w, 361w
No-fault compensation 195w

Handicapped pupils
Educational assessment 494-5w
Grant maintained schools 383-4w, 545w
Teacher training 24w, 53w
Wales 53w

Handicapped students
Further education 492w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office
Debates etc.
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast (17:05:93) 134-8
Questions
Ballyconnell Canal, Administrative costs 460w
Brook Advisory Centres, Northern Ireland 360-1
Dyslexia, Teacher training 292w
Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Public appointments 160w
Educational assessment, Northern Ireland 159w
Family planning, Northern Ireland 361
Food poisoning, Northern Ireland 688w
Health services, Rural areas 689w
Hearing aids, Children 160w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 158w
Hostels, Northern Ireland 500w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast 159-60w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Childbirth 159w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Hospital closures 159-60w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Midwives 687-9w
Legislative process, Administrative delays 292w
Making Belfast work programme 294-6w
Making Belfast work programme, Expenditure 296w
Making Belfast work programme, Schools 296w
Ministers' domestic visits, Upper Bann 501w
Multiple births, Northern Ireland 501-2w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis, Social security benefits 500-1w
Nurses, Manpower 292w
Play groups, Government grants 158w
Religious education, Northern Ireland 291-2w
Residential care, Northern Ireland 292w
Slaughterhouses, Northern Ireland 689w
Social security payments, Residential care 687-8w
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 363

Hannam, Sir John
Questions
Adjutant-General Corps, Relocation of employees 346w
Gambling, Expenditure 197w
National lottery 190w

Hanson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 273, 283
Local government reform, Wales (18:05:93) 194-5
VAT (18:05:93) 179
Questions
Fox hunting, Wales 312w
Hydatid disease, Wales 312w, 327w
Local government reform, Delyn 50w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 575w
Slaughterhouses, Wales 311-2w
Wages councils 523w

Hard core unemployed
419w
Older workers 622w
Wales 329w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 579-80
Government grants to local authorities 915-6

Harefield Hospital National Health Trust (Transfer of Trust Property) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 63-5
Questions
Council housing, Empty housing 911-2

Harman, Ms Harriet
Questions
Companies, Debts 106-7w
Domicil, Law reform 597w
Headteachers, Pay 493-4w
Income tax, Tax yields 664-5w
Loan guarantee scheme, Take-up 34-5w
Nursery nurses, Nursery schools 508-9w
Overseas investment, Personal income 572w
Overseas workers, Taxation 572w
Public sector, Pay settlements 536-7w
Public sector earnings 536-8w
Shares, Charities 107w
Teachers, Pay 495-6w

Harmonisation of standards
Nuclear reactors 487w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 710-1
Questions
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 90w

Harris Tweed Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R* (18:05:93) 139

Harvey, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 655-6
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 770-1, 796-8, 844-6, 854
Questions
Government grants to voluntary organisations 211w
Railway travel, South East region 554
Sea rescue, Devon 237w
THORP 610w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 866-7
Sports (17:05:93) 51
Questions
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 558
Railway freight transport, Privatisation 235w
Youth training 128-9w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 788-9, 791-2
Sports (17:05:93) 31, 67-8
Questions
Bail 380w
Investors in people 739

Hawksley, Mr Warren
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 495-9, 502

Hay fever
Air pollution 28-9w

Hayes, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 835
Questions
European fighter aircraft, Defence procurement 139
Proportional representation 155

Hayes Inquiry
see River Safety Inquiry

Hazardous materials
Industrial health & safety 217w

Headteachers
Pay 493-4w

Health & Safety at Work Etc Act 1974
Questions
40w

Health & Safety Executive
39w, 88-9w, 127w, (26:05:93) 1016-22

Health authorities
Administrative costs 260w
Capital investment 51w
Merseyside 446-8w, 670-5w
Public appointments 670-5w
Wales 51w

Health education
AIDS 27w
HIV infection 27w
Magazine press 330w
Manpower 153-4w

Health hazards
Comfrey 32-3w
Condensation 578w
Ozone layer 920-2
Radon gas 711w

Health service staff
Absenteeism 257w
Freedom of expression 577w
Scotland 37w
South Birmingham Health Authority 670w
Violence 469w
Wales 469w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority 670w

Health services
Contracts 256w
Dementia 147w
Diabetes 3
Homelessness 442w
Northern Ireland 689w
Rural areas 689w

Health surveys
Eye disorders 257w

Hearing aids
Children 160w, 170w
Northern Ireland 160w
Special education 167-8w
Wales 170w

Heart diseases
Expenditure 503-4w

Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 403-9

Heathrow Airport
685w
Air routes 90w
Night flying (27:05:93) 1054-63
Railway network 558
Railway travel 558

Hedges & ditches
Scotland 352w

Helicopter carriers
Defence contracts 143-4, 149, 627w
Defence procurement 232w, 511w, 625-7w
Marine engines 453-4w

Helicopters
Defence procurement 148-9
Military aid to civil community 142w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Questions
Employment protection 914-5

Hendron, Dr Joe
Debates etc.
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast (17:05:93) 131-3
Questions
Retail trade, Northern Ireland 356

Hendry, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Closure of Footpaths, Motion to introduce Bill negatived (26:05:93) 943-5
Questions
Housing associations 530w

Hendry, Mr Charles—continued
Local government reform, Derbyshire 153

Heppell, Mr John
Debates etc.
British Rail (21:05:93) 479
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 603-8, 611
Questions
Small businesses, Loans 453w
"Testing: The Facts" 601w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, President of the Board of Trade
Questions
Arab boycott 228
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 692-3w
British Gas, Exports 236
Coal mine closures 223w
Companies Registration Office (England & Wales), Performance standards 489w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Select Committee reports 690-1w
EC external trade 225w
Enterprise initiative 221w
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Manpower 237-8
GATT 223-4w
Government laboratories, Environmental research 690w
Industrial research 581-2w
Manufacturing industries, Derbyshire 234
Manufacturing industries, East Midlands 234
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 502-3w
Manufacturing industries, Teesside 227
National Weights & Measures Laboratory, Performance standards 690w
Observer, Mergers 691w
One stop shop initiative 221w
Overseas trade, Russia 236
Rover Group, Takeovers 580-1w
Shipping safety, Rivers 120w
Steetley Magnesia Products 228
Textiles, South Korea 693w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, Public appointments 490w
Warren Spring Laboratory, Property transfer 690w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Questions
Housing, Rural areas 907

Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Debates etc.
A27, Worthing (20:05:93) 472-6
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 577

High Court & County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(26:05:93) 1015

Higher education
Citizen's Charter 248w, 652w
Research 5-6
South Africa 481w

Higher education colleges
105w
Teacher training 553w

Hill, Mr James
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 311
Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill (HL), 3R (18:05:93) 206-7
Questions
European fighter aircraft, Defence procurement 140

Hill, Mr Keith
Questions
Transport supplementary grants 156w
Transport supplementary grants, Greater London 91-2w

Hillingdon Hospital
Industrial health & safety 259-61w

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Assisted areas, Wakefield (25:05:93) 894-6
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 78, 94-8
Sports (17:05:93) 48, 61-3
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Coal mine closures 692w
Coal, Local government expenditure 702w
Coal consumption, Power stations 693w
Coal mining, Privatisation 488w
Disability living allowance 564w, 629-30w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 561w
Energy research, Combined heat & power 532w
Handicap benefits, Administrative delays 562-4w
Hospices, Finance 675w
M1-M62 link 412-3w
Opencast mining, Production 701w
Public transport 415w
Road construction, Cost benefit analysis 414w
Road construction, Urban areas 416w
Road traffic 413-4w
Road traffic, Road construction 685w
Social security abuse 188-9w
Taxation, Rugby 13-4w
Terminal care, Income support 445-6w
Transport policy, Environment protection 415-6w

Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England
Marble Hill House 17w

Historic Buildings Council for Wales
Annual reports 327-8w

Historic Royal Palaces Agency
600w
Industrial health & safety 124-5w

HIV infection
Elderly 675w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 258w
Health education 27w
Scottish health boards 274w

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland
496w

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
259-61w, 354w, 617w

HM Inspectorate of Schools
607w
Further education colleges 734w
Scotland 734w

HMS Avenger
Chile 345w

HMSO
363-4w, 662w

Hoey, Ms Kate
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 262
Fire services (27:05:93) 1064-6, 1069
Questions
Church buildings, Insurance 71-2w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 358

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 44-5w, 514w, 516w, 571-80
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Military aircraft 371-2w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace keeping operations 373w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace negotiations 371-2w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 84w
Croatia, Armed conflict 42-3w
Croatia, Arms embargoes 513-4w
Croatia, Diplomatic relations 43w
Croatia, Human rights 513w

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas—continued
Croatia, Mercenaries 514w
Croatia, Prisoners 574w
Croatia, State visits 42w
European Committee for the Prevention of Torture 659w
European Convention on Human Rights 346-7w
European Convention on Human Rights, Judgments 370w
European Court of Human Rights, Administrative delays 370-1w
Georgia, Human rights 517w
Human rights, International conferences 575w
Israel, Human rights 373w
Macedonia, Recognition of states 515-6w
Nagorno Karabakh, Peace negotiations 514-5w
Serbia, Sanctions 44-5w, 373w
UN Security Council, USA 373-4w
United Nations, Human rights 574-5w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 42w, 46-7w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 517w
Yugoslavia, Mercenaries 517w
Yugoslavia, Peace keeping operations 372w
Yugoslavia, Sanctions 372w

Hogg, Ernest
206w

Holidays
Retail price index 161w

Holidays abroad
Price increases 112-3w, 160-1w, 285w
Retail price index 335-6w

Holloway
Unemployment 519-20w

Home energy efficiency scheme
175-6w

Home Office
209w, 565w
Children 63w
Computer privacy 726-7w
Contracts for services 427w, 475-6w
Government buildings 725w
Parliamentary questions 62-3w
Pathology 95-6w
Public expenditure 476w
Select Committee reports 473-4w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Air transport 345w
Army, Armed forces strength 346w
Bosnia, Herzegovina, Military aircraft 345w
Croatia, Armed forces deployment 511w
East Fortune Hospital, Geriatric patients 38w
HMS Avenger, Chile 345w
Speech impaired, Scotland 133w
Tourism, Northern Ireland 359
Warships, Marine fuels 346w

Homelessness
180w, 614-5w, 906
Coventry 180w
Health services 442w
Housing benefits 559w
West Midlands 180w

Homeowners' insurance
Price increases 111-2w

Homicide
Casement Park 290w
Children 238w
Convictions 290w
Racial attacks 422w

Hong Kong
Departmental correspondence 210w

Honours
Directors 225w

Hoon, Mr Geoffrey
Questions
Local government finance 611w

Horam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 819

Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 421-3

Hormone treatments
Counselling 668-9w
Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 669w

Horticulture
Occupational therapy 728w
Royal parks 479-80w
Scotland 728w

Hospices
Children 270w
Finance 675w
Scotland 270w

Hospital admissions
Hospital patients 151-2w

Hospital beds
Maternity services 26w

Hospital closures
Broadgreen Hospital 148w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast 159-60w
Mental hospitals 667-8w

Hospital consultants
Gynaecology 38w
NHS trusts 709w
Scotland 38w

Hospital discharges
Hospital patients 152w
Pensioners 194w

Hospital doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 52w, 149w, 158w, 273w
Northern Ireland 158w
Scotland 273w
Wales 52w

Hospital patients
Hospital admissions 151-2w
Hospital discharges 152w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust 196w
Royal Free NHS Trust 575w

Hospital visitor benefits
Child patients 635w

Hospital visitors
670w

Hospital waiting lists
Northern Regional Health Authority 578w
Wales 7-8

Hospitals
577w
Barry 715w
Patients' transport 670w
Security 577-8w
Theft 469w
Trafford (18:05:93) 161-3
Wales 469w

Hostels
Northern Ireland 462w, 500w
Planning permission 57w

House of Commons Commission
House of Commons select committees 484w

House of Commons debates
Defence estimates 454w
Speaker's rulings & statements (20:05:93) 379

House of Commons select committees
House of Commons Commission 484w

House prices
Price increases 111-2w

House purchase
Empty housing 534-5w

Housing
Rural areas 907
Wales 644-5w

Housing action trusts
530-1w

Housing association grant
(18:05:93) 161-3

Housing associations
530w, 906
Council housing 181w
Housing construction 905-6
Land acquisition 57-8w
Rented housing 154-5

Housing benefits
Contracts for services 694w
Homelessness 559w
Warrington 139-40w

Housing construction
916-7
Building industry 916
Council housing 615w
Developing countries 104w
Dundee 39w
Housing associations 905-6
Housing Corporation 181-2w
Housing finance 905-6
Planning permission 58w, 357w
Wales 646w

Housing Corporation
57-8w, 530-1w, 617w, 907
Housing construction 181-2w

Housing estates
Council housing management 917
Repairs & maintenance 917

Housing finance
530-1w
Housing construction 905-6

Housing improvement
Renfrew District Council 212w
Scottish Homes 212w

Housing revenue accounts
530-1w
Edinburgh District Council 269w
Renfrew District Council 212w

"How is Your Child Doing at School"
601-2w

Howard, Rt Hon Michael, *Secretary of State for the Environment*
Questions
Air pollution, Greater London 610w
Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England & Wales 618w
Building industry, Housing construction 916
Council house sales 608w
Dept of the Environment, Computer privacy 364-5w
Dept of the Environment, Government buildings 702w
Dept of the Environment, Parliamentary questions 59w
Geographical information systems, Computers in government departments 617w
Homelessness 906
Housing associations 906
Housing associations, Housing construction 905-6
Housing construction 916-7
Local authority powers 918-9
Non-departmental public bodies, Pay 366w

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 445-7
Questions
Ice cream, Monopolies 120-1w
Medical treatment abroad, British residents abroad 32w
Petroleum exploration, Liverpool Bay 233
Taxation, British residents abroad 14-5w

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 425-8

Howell, Rt Hon David—continued
Questions
London airports, Night flying 685w

Howells, Dr Kim
Questions
British Gas, Exports 236
Foreign companies in UK, Industrial research 224-5w
Health authorities, Capital investment 51w

Hoyle, Mr Doug
Questions
West Coast railway line, Railway travel 408w

Hughes, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 254, 271
Questions
NHS trusts, Directors 191w

Hughes, Mr Robert
Questions
Petroleum exploration, Tax allowances 537-8w

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
Planning permission, Wales 6

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Public transport, Greater London (27:05:93) 1079-83
Whales (17:05:93) 23
Questions
Animal welfare, EC law 542w
Association of County Councils, Environment protection 528w
British Nuclear Fuels, Company finance 451w
British Nuclear Fuels, Disclosure of information 579w
Ecolabelling 909
Economic policy, Greater London 417w
Electricity generation 223
Energy policy 342w
Government achievements 249w
Greater London 249w
Jubilee line 559-60
M3, Road construction 156w, 570w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 103w
Radioactive waste disposal, Magnox reactors 100w
Radioactive wastes 177w
River Thames, Bridges 4w
Road tolls 415w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 100w
Social sciences education, Research finance 245w
Southern Africa, Development aid 20w
Terrorism 12
Training credits, Vocational training 520w
Youth unemployment 518w

"Human Development Report, 1993"
589w

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Act 1990
Questions
192w

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority
192w
Finance 192w

Human rights
(27:05:93) 1024-34
Cambodia 45-6w
China 516w
Croatia 252-4w, 513w
Diplomatic service 166w
East Timor 102w
Georgia 517w
Indonesia 515w
International conferences 575w
Israel 373w
Mozambique 48w
United Nations 574-5w

Hume, Mr John
Debates etc.
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast (17:05:93) 133-4, 137

Hunt, Rt Hon David, *Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 123
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 949-60
Questions
Agriculture, Environment protection 53w, 544-5w
Agri-environment action plan, Wales 135w
Assisted areas, Bridgend 713w
Assisted areas, Wales 713w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy, Wales 135-6w
British Columbia, Wales 50w
Building industry, Wales 642w, 644w
Cardiff Bay barrage 546w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation 712-3w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Recruitment 49-50w
Cattle, Wales 649w
Cereals, Agricultural production 714w
Company management, Management techniques 639w
Development Board for Rural Wales, Public appointments 169w
Disability living allowance, Wales 53w
EC Agriculture Commissioner 327-8w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 3-5
EC grants & loans, Local authorities 472w
EC regional policy, Wales 50w
Employment, Wales 329w, 466w
Employment level, Mid Glamorgan 49w
Employment schemes, Wales 646w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Wales 710w
Exports, Wales 710w
Fisheries, Civil service manpower 470w
Fishing, Wales 8-9
Foreign companies in UK, Manpower 552w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 548-50w
Fox hunting, Wales 312w
Government grants to local authorities, Wales 648w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 7-8
Hydatid disease, Wales 312w, 327w
Industrial estates, Wales 710w
Industrial injuries scheme, Social security recipients 56w
Industrial production, Wales 638w
Institute of Welsh Affairs 643w
Integrated administration & control system, Wales 544w, 649w, 712w
Integrated administration & control system, Welsh language 554w
Invalidity benefits, Social security recipients 56-7w
Llanelli Borough Council, Regional planning & development 311w
Local authorities, Billing 326w
Local government reform, Vale of Glamorgan 50w
Local government reform, Wales 135w
Local government services, Contracts for services 716-7w
Local government staff, Wales 647w
Local plans, Welsh districts 53-5w
New businesses, Wales 554w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 465w, 714-6w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 545w
One stop shop initiative, Wales 470w
Pay, Wales 465-6w
Police, Wales 648w
Power stations, Point of Ayr 546w
Pregnant women, Dismissal 467w
Public appointments, Wales 169w
RECHAR, Wales 51w
Redundancy, Gwent 555w
Reed beds, Wales 640-2w
Regional enterprise grants, Clwyd 545-6w
Regional planning & development, Wales 49w
Regional selective assistance, Clwyd 546w
Regional selective assistance, Employment opportunities 646-7w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 705-6w

Hunt, Rt Hon David—continued
Self-employed, Wales 310w, 709-10w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 713w
Sheep, Ear tagging 718w
Slaughterhouses, Wales 311-2w, 648w, 713w
Small businesses, Advisory services 549-50w
Small businesses, Wales 134w, 309-10w
Support for products under research scheme, Clwyd 640w
Sustainable development, Wales 51w
Town & country planning, Wales 714w
Unemployment, Ethnic groups 313w
Unemployment, Wales 55-6w, 313-4w, 329w
Vacancies, Wales 327w
Welsh Development Agency, Government grants 547w
Welsh Office, Computer privacy 472w
Welsh Office, Contracts for services 555w
Welsh Office, Select Committee reports 713w
Welsh Office, Trade missions 547-8w
Working hours, Wales 11

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Questions
Local government reform 358w
Mozambique, Elections 48-9w
Mozambique, Human rights 48w
Mozambique, Overseas aid 19-20w
RENAMO, Foreign policy 48w
Training for work 519w

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 381-94
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 166-7w

Hutton, Mr John
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 312
Questions
Defence review, Submarines 142
Employment protection, EC law 463w
Medical equipment, Charitable donations 675w

Hydatid disease
Wales 312w, 327w

Hydrochlorofluorocarbons
357w

Hydrographic Office
Performance standards 623w

Ice cream
Monopolies 120-1w

Identity cards
203-4w
Social security abuse 693w

Ilford
Employment Service local offices 523-4w

Illegal immigrants
Deportation 433w
Immigrant detainees 434w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Questions
Mine service centres 229w
Redundancy, Barnsley 741
Shipping safety, Rivers 120w

Imitation guns
237-8w

Immigrant detainees
Deportation 433w
Detention centres 434-5w
Illegal immigrants 434w
Political refugees 434w

Immigrants
Social security recipients 184w

Immigration
Advisory services 718w

Immigration Appeal Tribunal
69-70w

Immigration appeals
69-70w, 316w, 722w

Immigration applications
41-2w, 96w
Indian Subcontinent 374w

Immigration controls
Prestwick Airport (27:05:93) 1072-8

Import controls
Offensive weapons 161w

Import of live animals
Birds 172w
Tanzania 172w

Import penetration
662w
Manufactured imports 488w

Imports
223w
Materials 280-2w

Improvement notices
217w, 622-3w

In vitro fertilisation
Scotland 727w
Wales 650w

Incinerators
Belvedere 579w
EC law 173w
Planning permission 173w
ReChem International 620w

Income support
Mortgages 72w, 558-60w, 693w, 706w
Pensioners 631-2w
Pregnant women 298w
Social security benefits disqualification 140w
Social security payments 306-8w
Terminal care 445-6w
Tower Hamlets 136w
Wales 457-8w, 633-4w, 706w
Young people 78w, 309w

Income tax
Administrative costs 635-6w
Directors 418w
Tax rates & bands 418w
Tax yields 664-5w
Taxpayers 573-4w

Independent Living 1993 Fund
138w

Independent Television Commission
123w

Independent Tribunal Service
297w

India
591-2w
Environment protection 357w
Political prisoners 661w

Indian subcontinent
124w
Immigration applications 374w

Indonesia
Arms trade 146
Human rights 515w
Nuclear power 590w
Overseas aid 590w, 658-9w
Overseas loans 252w

Industrial accidents
Employment schemes 315-22w
Ports 653-4w

Industrial disputes
Employment protection 738
Lost working days 517w

Industrial energy consumption
528w

Industrial estates
Wales 710w

Industrial health & safety
EC law 40w
Hazardous materials 217w

Industrial health & safety—continued
Hillingdon Hospital 259-61w
Historic Royal Palaces Agency 124-5w
Orders & regulations 40-1w, 127w, 129w, 621w
Prosecutions 130w
Radiation hazards 218w

Industrial Injuries Advisory Council
188w

Industrial injuries scheme
Self-employed 188w
Social security recipients 56w
Wales 56w

Industrial investment
East Midlands 234

Industrial policy
235

Industrial production
Exchange rates 110w
Wales 638w

Industrial relations
NHS trusts 134-5w

Industrial research
581-2w
Foreign companies in UK 224-5w

Industrial training
Manufacturing industries 737

Industrial Tribunals
441w

Infant mortality
Scotland 274-8w

Infanticide
Allitt, Beverley (18:05:93) 163-6, 669-70w
China 44w

Inflation
224, 235

Information
Magistrates' courts 69w

Information technology
Members' facilities 104-5w

Injuries
Road accidents 568w

Inland Revenue
Postal rates 419w
Scotland 15w

Inner city areas
Drug abuse 421-2w
Glasgow 271w
Government grants 703-4w
Small businesses 610w

Inner London educational grants
915

Innovation
Expenditure 228w

Insider trading
112-3w

Insolvency
Travel agents 226-7

Insolvency (Amendment) Rules 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

Institute of Welsh Affairs
643w

Insurance
British residents abroad 541w
Church buildings 71-2w

Insurance companies
Company accounts 230-1
EC action 230-1

Integrated administration & control system
24-5w, 172-3w, 243w, 542w, 596w
Administrative costs 243w

Integrated administration & control system—continued
Agricultural subsidies (18:05:93) 190-3
Wales 544w, 649w, 712w
Welsh language 554w

Intelligence services
122w

Interdepartmental Racial Attacks Group
338-9w, 435w

Interest rates
161w, 281-2w

International aid from international bodies
Bosnia-Herzegovina 251w, 349w

International assistance
Macedonia 515-6w

International Atomic Energy Agency
487w

International conferences
European Nuclear Safeguards Research Development Association 286w
Human rights 575w

International cooperation
Environment protection 179w

International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights
346-7w

International Energy Agency
286w

International Military Services
Government shareholding 418w, 677w

International Planned Parenthood Federation
20-1w
UK contributions 21w

International trade
National Consumer Council 227w

International Whaling Commission
(17:05:93) 19-28

Intimidation
Schools 106w

Invalidity benefits
Social security benefits disqualification 75w
Social security benefits rules 76-7w
Social security recipients 56-7w
Wales 56-7w

Inverclyde Royal Hospital
Cervical cancer 449-50w

Inverness
Civil service dispersal 421w

Invest in Britain Bureau
121w

Investment Management Regulatory Organisation
Self-regulating organisations 539-41w

Investor protection
Financial services 539-41w

Investors in people
737-9

IRA
(24:05:93) 581, (27:05:93) 1035-44

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
(18:05:93) 205-10

Isle of Wight County Council
367-8w

Israel
Human rights 373w
Overseas trade 116w

Jack, Mr Michael, Minister of State, Home Office
Questions
Burglary, Wales 238-40w
Cheque cards, Photographs 240-1w

Jack, Mr Michael—continued
Child abuse, Death 337-8w
Children, Homicide 238w
Convictions, Confessions 722w
Crime, Devon 241-2w
Criminal Justice Bill (HL) 1992/93, Prison accommodation 422w
Drinking & driving, Convictions 425w
Drug abuse, Inner city areas 421-2w
Drug abuse, Narcotics 336w
Drug abuse, Young people 477w, 566w, 720w
Drug crimes, Confiscation orders 719-20w
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 239-40w
Drug seizures 337-8w, 573w
Drugs, Prices 336-8w
Drugs & crime 422w
Ecstacy, Death 338w
Ecstacy, Drug seizures 204-5w
Fines 65w, 209-10w, 339-40w, 428w, 474w, 567w, 719w
Fines, Disposable income 241w, 433w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 211w
Home Office, Children 63w
Identity cards 203-4w
Litter, Prosecutions 238w
Magistrates' courts, Redbridge 723w
Magistrates' courts, Rugeley 61w
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 61-2w
Motor vehicle theft 65w
Motor vehicle theft, Convictions 428-34w
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 93-4w
Parsons, Brian, Convictions 93w
Pornography, Prosecutions 425w
Probation 60w
Probation & aftercare, Voluntary organisations 339w
Probation hostels, Greater London 566w
Probation supervision grants scheme, Wales 205w
Racial attacks, Homicide 422w
Racial attacks, Law reform 422w
Racial attacks, Pendle 718w
Rape, Young offenders 66w
Relate, Government grants 196-7w
Safer cities scheme 206w
Safer cities scheme, Finance 206-7w
Secure accommodation 477w
Seized Assets Fund 197-203w
Suspended sentences 425w
Television licences, Tax evasion 66w
Victim support schemes, Government grants 96-7w
Witnesses, Children 205w
Young offenders, Supervision orders 433w

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 275
British Rail, Points of order (21:05:93) 480
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 597, 613-5
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 773
Whales (17:05:93) 25
Questions
Local government staff, Employment protection 914

Jackson, Mrs Helen
Questions
Ucar Carbon 224-5

Jackson, Mr Robert, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Minister for the Civil Service
Questions
Advisory bodies, Members' interests 662w
British Antarctic Survey 157-8w
Zidovudine, Clinical trials 579w

Jamieson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 325-7
Rosyth Dockyard, Nuclear safety (18:05:93) 220
Questions
Armed forces civilians, South West region 525-6w
Dog licences 182w
Dogs 182w

Japan
Plutonium 487w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Questions
Securities & Investments Board, Self-regulating organisations 665w
Speed limits, Road safety 409-10w

Jenkins Committee
see NHS Management Functions & Manpower Review

Jessel, Mr Toby
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1054-5, 1057, 1062

Jobplan workshops
520-2w

Johnston, Sir Russell
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 89-92, 99
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 409-12

Johnstone
Sports centres 735w

"Joint Enterprise & Parents"
255-6w

Jones, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 30
Whales (17:05:93) 24
Questions
Aerospace industry, Exports 117-8w
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 117w
Aerospace industry, Manpower 117w
British Aerospace, Broughton 237
Chemists shops, Wales 468w, 639w
Family doctors, Pharmacies 467-8w
Hard core unemployed 419w
Local authority powers 918
Local government reform 532w
Pharmacists, Pay 639w
River Dee, Bridges 556
Road construction, North Wales 50w
Unemployment, Wales 313-4w
Youth unemployment 741-2

Jones, Mr Gwilym, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 115
Questions
Chemists shops, Wales 468w, 639w
Council housing management, Council tenants 717-8w
Council tax, Wales 638w
Council tax exemptions, Mentally disadvantaged 555-6w
Dental services, Gwynedd 134w
Dentists, Family health services authorities 470-1w
Diabetes, Blindness 709w
Diabetes, Health services 3
Disabled workers, Local government staff 312w
Drug abuse, Wales 169w, 545w
Empty housing, Wales 708w
Eye tests, Wales 311w
Family doctors, Pharmacies 467-8w
Glass, Recycling 706w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Wales 10
Health authorities, Capital investment 51w
Health service staff, Violence 469w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 52w
Hospitals, Barry 715w
Hospitals, Theft 469w
Housing, Wales 644-5w
Housing construction, Wales 646w
In vitro fertilisation, Wales 650w

Jones, Mr Gwilym—continued
Income support, Mortgages 706w
Local government finance, Wales 11
Local government reform, Planning 135w
Mortgage defaulters, Repossession orders 310-1w
Mortgage interest rates, Local authorities 328w
Mortgages, Wales 645w
Negative equity, Wales 646w
Negligence, Handicapped children 170w
Nervous system disorders, Medical research 311w
NHS, Land values 707w
NHS Joint Staff Consultative Councils, Wales 556w
NHS trusts, Employment protection 716w
NHS trusts, Hospital consultants 709w
NHS trusts, Industrial relations 134-5w
NHS trusts, Wales 3
Pharmacists, Pay 52-3w, 312-3w, 639w
Pharmacists, Wales 52w
Planning permission, Wales 646w
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff, Orthopaedics 714w
Radon gas, Health hazards 711w
ReChem International, Incinerators 620w
River Ebbw, River pollution 638w
Temporary accommodation, Wales 708w
Water charges, Debts 467w
Water supply, Lead pollution 709w
Water treatment, Wales 711w
Wind power, Wales 6
Withybush Hospital, Building repairs 471-2w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 834
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 953-4, 983
Questions
Agri-environment action plan, Wales 135w
Armed forces, Asbestosis 84w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Refugees 95w
Burglary, Wales 238-40w
Comfrey, Health hazards 32-3w
Customs & Excise, Drug crimes 242w
Day care of children, Government grants 552-3w
Dementia, Health services 147w
Developing countries, Commodities 377w
Drug abuse, Narcotics 336w
Drug abuse, Schools 169w
Drug abuse, Wales 169w, 545w
Drug crimes, Crime prevention 417w
Drug seizures 337-8w, 573w
Drug seizures, EC countries 417-8w
Drugs, Prices 336-8w
Drugs & crime 422w
EC Agriculture Commissioner 327-8w
EC regional policy, Wales 50w
Ecstacy, Death 338w
Ecstacy, Drug seizures 204-5w
Educational qualifications, Wales 328w
Employment, Wales 466w
Employment protection, Pregnant women 321w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Wales 10
Health service staff, Violence 469w
Hospitals, Theft 469w
Income support, Pregnant women 298w
Income support, Wales 457w
Medical malpractice 329w
National insurance contributions, Self-employed 183-4w
Negligence, Handicapped children 170w, 194w, 361w
No-fault compensation, Handicapped children 195w
Pay, Wales 465-6w
Pharmaceutical services, Chemists shops 33w
Pharmacists, Pay 31w, 52-3w
Pharmacists, Wales 52w
Political refugees, Angola 425w
Pregnant women, Dismissal 467w
Self-employed, Wales 310w
Skin disorders, Medical treatments 444w
Smuggling, Animals 418w

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn—continued
Social security benefits rules, Self-employed 137w
Social security recipients, Self-employed 183w
Social workers' training, Wales 51-2w
Tax allowances, Self-employed pensions 13w
Tax allowances, Vocational training 281w
Training, Young people 744-5
Training & enterprise councils, Day care of children 469w
Training credits 218w
UN Development Programme, Non-governmental organisations 101w
Unemployment 216w
Unemployment, Ethnic groups 313w
Unemployment, Wales 329w
Unemployment benefits, Earnings rules 72w
Unfair dismissal, Pregnant women 249w
United Nations, Peace keeping operations 42w
United Nations, UK contributions 376-8w
Vacancies, Wales 327w
Youth training, Pregnant women 544w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Questions
Cambodia, Human rights 45-6w
Cambodia, Peace negotiations 46w
Drugs, Packaging 505w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 3-4
Indian Subcontinent, Immigration applications 374w
Israel, Human rights 373w
NHS trusts, Industrial relations 134-5w
Petroleum revenue tax, Tax reform 419w
Product safety, EC law 223w

Jones, Dr Lynne
Questions
Mental hospitals, Hospital closures 667-8w

Jones, Mr Martyn
Questions
Fishing, Wales 8-9

Jones, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Government Communications Headquarters, Trade unions (18:05:93) 169-70
Questions
Advisory bodies, Members' interests 662w
Council tax capping, Gloucestershire 613-4w
County councils, Local government finance 367-8w
Fertility, Gloucestershire District Health Authority 444w
Government grants to local authorities 705w
Government grants to local authorities, Wales 648w
Inland Revenue, Postal rates 419w
Prisoners on remand 727w

Jones, Mr Robert B
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 71-8, 85-7, 98, 100, 102, 107
Questions
Ecolabelling 908-9
Parliamentary parking 24w

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 876, 880-1

Journalists
Departmental correspondence 250w

Jowell, Ms Tessa
Questions
Career development loan scheme, Employment opportunities 217w
Health service staff, Absenteeism 257w
Mental Health Act 1983, Codes of practice 30w
NHS internal market 440w
Youth training, Waiting lists 521w

Jubilee Hospital Belfast
159-60w
Childbirth 159w

Jubilee Hospital Belfast—continued
Hospital closures 159-60w
Midwives 687-9w

Jubilee line
378, 558-61, 661w, (27:05:93) 1079-86

Judges
Training 731w

Judgments
European Convention on Human Rights 370w

Judiciary
Public appointments 657w
Training 656w

Junior hospital doctors
Manpower 26-8w
Working hours 257w

Jurisdiction
Courts (26:05:93) 1015

Justices' Clerks' Society
241w

Kashmir
660-1w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Questions
Benefits Agency district offices, Manchester 78-9w
Electorate, Manchester 509w
Mohammed, Abdullahi, Members' correspondence 341w
Urban programme, Manchester 618w

Kearney, Jeremiah
Death 32w

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 247
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 876, 880
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 407
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 608
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 796
Questions
Defence review, Armed forces reserves 142-3

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Questions
Skye bridge, Construction 38w, 273-4w
Treasury, Civil service dispersal 421w

Kennedy, Mrs Jane
Questions
Health authorities, Merseyside 446-8w

Kerr Little
Government assistance 497w

Key, Mr Robert, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of National Heritage
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 42, 44-5, 52-61, 65
Questions
Dept of National Heritage, Computer privacy 189w
Dept of National Heritage, Parliamentary questions 123w
Museums & galleries, Government grants 189w
Museums & galleries, Purchase grants 479w
Museums & galleries, Repairs & maintenance 189-90w
National lottery 190w
National lottery, Consultants 190-1w
Royal parks, Horticulture 479-80w
Royal residences, Fire regulations 124-5w
Royal residences, Public expenditure 480-1w
Tourism 244w
Tourist industry 126w
Tourists, Stratford-on-Avon 478w

Kilfedder, Sir James
Debates etc.
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1039

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 55, 68-70
Whales (17:05:93) 26

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Questions
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 4

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Questions
Business questions 372
Cockburnspath bypass, Road accidents 588w
Cockburnspath bypass, Road safety 587-8w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 84w
Forestry Commission, Land ownership & tenure 736w
Maternity services, Scotland 215w
Ministerial policy advisors, Conditions of employment 368w
Ministers, Finance 660w
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 919-20
South Africa, Overseas aid 481w

Knapman, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 391
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 934
Questions
Council tax 910
Railway freight transport 411w

Knight, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 279-82
Questions
Companies Registration Office (England & Wales), Performance standards 489w
EC Telecommunications Council 489-90w
Manufacturing industries, Derbyshire 234

Knight, Dame Jill
Questions
Youth training 743

Know-how Fund
349-50w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Council house sales 608w
Educational standards, Wales 8
Lost working days, Industrial disputes 517w

Kouver programme
(19:05:93) 297-341

Kuwait
Arms trade 140-1

Kvaerner Govan
625-7w
Government grants 582w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w

Kynoch, Mr George
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Parental contributions 272w
Economic situation 365-6
Employment level, EC countries 743
Student grants, Scotland 272w

Labour costs
Civil service 666w
Manufacturing industries 524w

Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 273-4
Questions
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 52w, 149w, 158w, 273w
Medical malpractice, Costs 147w
National Weights & Measures Laboratory, Privatisation 690w
Railway stations, Ashford 410w

Lambeth
Refuse disposal 365-6w
Youth employment 520-1w

Lambeth—continued
Youth training 520-1w

Lambeth Borough Council
Council tax 910
Local government corruption 750

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 463-9
Questions
EC Finance Council 666-7w
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, Self-regulating organisations 539-41w
Sunday Times, Departmental correspondence 663w

Lancashire Enterprises
Retex 228-9

Land acquisition
City technology colleges 652w
Forestry Commission 584w
Housing associations 57-8w

Land ownership & tenure
Forestry Commission 351w, 736w

Land use
Set-aside schemes 243w

Land values
NHS 707w

Landlord & tenant
Law reform 16-7, 698w

Landscape design
635w

Lang, Rt Hon Ian, Secretary of State for Scotland
Questions
Cervical cancer, Screening 449-50w
Civil service agencies, Scotland 584-6w
Council tax capping, Scotland 735-6w
Edinburgh University Dental School, Departmental correspondence 214w
Fire Services Benevolent Fund, Scotland 727-8w
Government buildings, Access to buildings 734w
HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland 496w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Scotland 351w
Scottish Office, Computer privacy 270w
Scottish Office, Management consultants 738w
Scottish Office, Select Committee reports 588w
Sea transport, Scottish Islands 587w
Sea transport, Subsidies 586-7w

Langlands review
see NHS Management Functions & Manpower Review

Law Officers' Dept
see Attorney General

Law reform
Domicil 597w
Landlord & tenant 16-7, 698w
Racial attacks 422w

Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Questions
Suspended sentences 425w

Lead free petrol
35w

Lead pollution
Water supply 176w, 709w

Leaseback arrangements
Rolling stock 410w

Leasehold housing
Local government expenditure 698w

Leather & fur industries
Origin marking 34w

Leeds
635w

Legal aid
15-6
Battered women 15
Domestic violence 17
Maintenance (24:05:93) 728
Women 16

Legal aid scheme
17

Legal costs
Planning appeals 352w

Legal education
Educational finance (27:05:93) 1095-102

Legal profession
Equal opportunities 657w
Student grants 403w, 656-7w

Legal representation
Bickley, Raymond 166w

Legislative process
Administrative delays 292w
Northern Ireland 292w

Leicester
Baliffs 656w

Leicestershire County Council
Local government services 905

Leigh, Mr Edward Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Technology
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 288-92
Export promotion (21:05:93) 481-7, 538-40
Inflation, Points of order (21:05:93) 509
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 224w
Cellular phones, Fraud 225-6
Deaf, Public telephones 33w
Design Council 222w
EC Telecommunications Council 489-90w
Enterprise initiative 288w
Foreign companies in UK, Industrial research 224-5w
Glaxo, Warren Spring Laboratory 342w
Loan guarantee scheme 450w
Loan guarantee scheme, Take-up 34-5w
Origin marking, Leather & fur industries 34w
Package holidays, EC law 450w
Patents, Genetic engineering 227-8w
Post offices, Social security payments 228w
Product safety, EC law 223w
Small businesses, Loans 453w
SMART awards 451-2w
Technology transfer, Expenditure 228w
Telecommunications industry, UK companies abroad 450-1w
Trade marks 34w
Training & enterprise councils, Small businesses 288w
Travel agents, Insolvency 226-7

Leighton, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 449-50
Questions
Employment training 218w
Regional aid, EC countries 347-8w
Training, Young people 745
Unemployment 216w

Lennox-Boyd, Mr Mark, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill (HL), 3R (18:05:93) 207-10
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 18w, 376w
BBC External Services 254w
Belize, Rain forests 21w
Bickley, Raymond, Legal representation 166w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, International aid from international bodies 251w

Lennox-Boyd, Mr Mark*—*continued
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Overseas aid 377-8w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Prisoners 254w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rape 348w
British dependent territories, Overseas aid 103w
Cambodia, Overseas aid 103w
China, Family planning 20-1w
Croatia, Overseas aid 348w
Deserts 349w
Developing countries, Commodities 377w
Developing countries, Family planning 590w
Developing countries, Housing construction 104w
Developing countries, Road construction 379w
Diplomatic relations, Ministers' visits abroad 41w
Diplomatic service, Human rights 166w
East Timor, Overseas aid 104w
EC Development Council, Development aid 18w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Computer privacy 101-2w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Parliamentary questions 48w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Select Committee reports 349w, 515w
Global environmental facility 589w
"Human Development Report, 1993" 589w
Immigration applications 41-2w
Indian Subcontinent, Immigration applications 374w
Indonesia, Nuclear power 590w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 590w, 658-9w
Indonesia, Overseas loans 252w
International Planned Parenthood Federation, UK contributions 21w
Know-how Fund 349-50w
Macedonia, Overseas aid 378w
Mattoo, Hamida, Death 660w
Mozambique, Elections 48-9w
Mozambique, Human rights 48w
Mozambique, Overseas aid 19-20w
Narmada dam 591-2w
Nigeria, Overseas aid 376w
Non-governmental organisations, Family planning 590-2w
Overseas aid, Democracy 570
Overseas aid, Expenditure 21w, 103w
Overseas aid, Family planning 252w
Poverty 376w
RENAMO, Foreign policy 48w
Royal family, Official visits 347w
Russia, Overseas aid 375w
St Helena, Overseas aid 589-90w
Serbia, Refugees 251w
Serbia, Sanctions 349w
South Africa, Democracy 568
South Africa, Overseas aid 481w, 568-9
Southern Africa, Development aid 20w
SubSaharan Africa, Economic situation 19w, 379w
Sudan, Overseas aid 567
UN Conference on Environment & Development, UK delegations 350w
UN Development Programme, Non-governmental organisations 101w
United Nations, UK contributions 376-8w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy 568
Wilton Park Executive Agency, Performance standards 254w
World Health Organisation, Tuberculosis 570
Yugoslavia, Refugees 378w
Yugoslavia, Visas 252-3w

Lestor, Miss Joan
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 272
Members' conduct, Points of order (25:05:93) 753
Questions
Miscarriages of justice, Compensation 61-2w
Northern Ireland government 357
Poverty 376w

Level crossings
Accidents 86w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 271-3
Questions
Business questions 377
Health authorities, Administrative costs 260w

Lidington, Mr David
Debates etc.
Aylesbury bypass (24:05:93) 729-31
Questions
Beef, West Africa 363w
Church property, Bombings 12
Crossrail 407-8w
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Performance standards 98w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 253-61
Questions
National insurance, Administrative costs 635-6w
War Pensions Agency 564w

Limited list prescribing
330w
Contraceptives 255w, 576w

Link programme
(26:05:93) 923-37

Liquefied petroleum gas
Gas safety (26:05:93) 1016-22

Listed buildings
Greater London 697w
Paisley 214w
Renfrew 214w

Litter
Prosecutions 238w

Liverpool
Airports 225w
Arts festivals 177-8w
City challenge 59w
City technology colleges 652w
Community development 182w
Festivals & special occasions 230w
Railway travel 89w

Liverpool Bay
Petroleum exploration 232-3

Liverpool Health Authority
148w

Liverpool Riverside
Unemployment 131w

Llandough Hospital
715w

Llanelli Borough Council
Accounting 311w
Regional planning & development 311w

Llanerfyl Primary School
Grant maintained schools 650w

Lloyd, Mr Peter, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Racial attacks (21:05:93) 545-52
Questions
Blakenhurst Prison, Per capita costs 68-9w
Cardiff Prison, Prison education services 207-9w
Child abuse, Mental health services 338-9w
Child abuse, Prison population 720-1w
Civil defence, Government grants to local authorities 98w
Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations 1993 95w
Computer privacy, EC action 204w
Computer privacy, EC law 338w
Drug crimes, Prison sentences 719w
Emergency planning, Government grants to local authorities 63-5w
Emergency planning, Warnings 204w, 566w

Lloyd, Mr Peter*—*continued
European Parliament constituencies 567w, 724w
Fine defaulters, Prison sentences 341w
Fire engines, Emergency planning 62w
Fire services, Manpower 423-4w
Fire services, Marchington 475-6w
Fire services, Pay 475w
Fires, Factories 65w
Gambling, Expenditure 197w
Group 4 Securitas, Prisoner escorts 68w, 91-3w
Home Office, Computer privacy 726-7w
Home Office, Pathology 95-6w
Lowdham Grange Young Offenders' Institution, Property transfer 67-8w
Metropolitan Police, Computer privacy 477-8w
Open prisons 722-3w
Parliamentary constituencies, Wales 237w
Prison population 724w
Prison Service, Contracts for services 426w
Prison staff, Ethnic minorities 66-7w
Prisoner escorts, Restraint equipment 94w
Prisoners, Death 566w
Prisoners on remand 727w
Prisoners' transport, Death 205-6w
Prisons, Civil servants' business appointments 565w
Prisons, Ships 724-5w
Segregation of prisoners 721w
Sunday trading 724w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prison staff 718-9w
Women's prisons, Sexual harassment 239w
Young offenders, Prison accommodation 426w
Young offenders, Prison population 427-8w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Government grants to local authorities, Public petitions (25:05:93) 893
Questions
Investors in people 737-8
Pink, Graham, Stockport Health Authority 441w
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 31-2w
Youth training 463-4w

Lloyd Committee
see Gene Therapy Advisory Committee

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Legal education (27:05:93) 1095-8
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 827
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 954, 994-9
Questions
A470, Road works 470w, 553w
A494, Road works 170w
Army in Northern Ireland, Armed forces casualties 625w
Cardiff Airport, Air routes 555w
Coal mining, Energy review 489w
Dental services, Gwynedd 134w
Discretionary student grants, Wales 554w
East Timor, Human rights 102w
East Timor, Overseas aid 104w
EC grants & loans, Local authorities 472w
Employment, Wales 329w
Eye tests 145-6w
Eye tests, Wales 311w
Institute of Welsh Affairs 643w
Integrated administration & control system, Welsh language 554w
Local government reform, Planning 135w
Local government staff, Wales 647w
Non-departmental public bodies, Pay 366w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 545w
Planning permission, Wales 6
Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry 61w
Prisoners, Death 566w
Probation 60w
Probation supervision grants scheme, Wales 205w
Public appointments, Wales 169w
Select Committee reports, Attorney General 681-2w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn—continued
Select Committee reports, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 568w
Select Committee reports, Dept for Education 22w
Select Committee reports, Dept of Employment 248-50w
Select Committee reports, Dept of Health 146w
Select Committee reports, Dept of Trade & Industry 690-1w
Select Committee reports, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 349w, 515w
Select Committee reports, Home Office 473-4w
Select Committee reports, Lord Chancellor's Dept 361-2w
Select Committee reports, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 595-6w
Select Committee reports, Northern Ireland Office 158w
Select Committee reports, Scottish Office 588w
Select Committee reports, Treasury 417w
Select Committee reports, Welsh Office 713w
Student grants 491w
Student grants, Legal profession 403w
Student loans 23w, 105w, 492w
Tourists, Wales 645-6w
UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission, Armed forces casualties 625w
University of Wales, Manpower 467-8w
Water charges, Debts 467w
Water supply disconnections, Environmental health 697-8w
Witnesses, Children 205w
Young offenders, Discrimination 553w

Loan guarantee scheme
450w
Take-up 34-5w

Loans
Small businesses 453w

Local authorities
Billing 326w
EC grants & loans 472w
Mortgage interest rates 328w
Wales 326w

Local authority powers
918-9

Local enterprise companies
132w

Local Fisheries Committee (Fees for Copy Byelaws) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

Local Government & Housing Act 1989
Questions
414w

Local government borrowing
Water supply 14w

Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland
Local government constituencies 133w

Local Government Commission for England
153, 372, 532w

Local government constituencies
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland 133w

Local government corruption
Lambeth Borough Council 750

Local government expenditure
Coal 702w
Education 466-8w
Government grants to local authorities 616-7w
Leasehold housing 698w
Wales 648w

Local government finance
611-3w
County councils 367-8w

Local government finance—continued
Wales 11

Local government land
Agricultural land 542w

Local government maladministration
913

Local government reform
358w, 532w, 615w
Delyn 50w
Derbyshire 153
Planning 135w
Staffordshire (18:05:93) 166-9
Vale of Glamorgan 50w
Wales 135w, (18:05:93) 194-5, 647w, 716-7w

Local government revenue
Council house sales 612-3w

Local government services
Competition 355w
Contracts for services 364w, 609w, 716-7w
Leicestershire County Council 905
Recycling 356w
Youth services 22w

Local government social services
Children in care 667w

Local government staff
358w
Disabled workers 312w
Employment protection 914
Redbridge 615w
Wales 647w

Local plans
Welsh districts 53-5w

London airports
Night flying 685w

London boroughs
Assisted areas 287w

London Buses
1w
Privatisation 409-10w

London docklands
332w

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham) Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Lords amendts* (20:05:93) 351
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1104

London Docklands Railway (Lewisham) (No 2) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Lords amendts* (20:05:93) 351
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1104

London Local Authorities Bill (HL) 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R order read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903

London Regional Transport
Crimes of violence 407w

London Underground
86w, 416w

Lord, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 291

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Annual reports 69w
Computer privacy 315-6w
Select Committee reports 361-2w

Lorries
90w

Lorry drivers
Working hours 483-4w

Lost working days
Industrial disputes 517w

Lothian
Water charges 269w

Low flying
Belize 143w
Complaints 143-4w
South Yorkshire 624w

Low incomes
Mortgage relief 419w

Lowdham Grange Young Offenders' Institution
Property transfer 67-8w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 273, 274-6
Questions
Dock labour scheme 654w
Industrial accidents, Ports 653-4w

Luchaire Defence
Defence contracts 678w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 92-4
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 646
Questions
Aid financed trade, Developing countries 751-2
Enterprise initiative 221w
Helicopters, Defence procurement 148-9
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Public appointments 195w

Lung diseases
Medical equipment 575w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Attorney-General
Questions
Attorney General, Civil service manpower 380w
Attorney General, Computer privacy 323w
Attorney General, Select Committee reports 681-2w
Bail 380w
Bail, Extradition 564-5
Clark, Alan, Autobiography 565-6
Crime victims, Administration of justice 13w
Criminal proceedings 4-14w
Extradition, Cyprus 565
Former Ministers, Autobiography 566
Military discipline, Falkland Islands 234w
Nadir, Asil, Bail 565
Racial attacks 473w

Lynne, Ms Liz
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 692
Questions
Disabled workers, Training 740
Environment protection 611w
Pharmacists, Pay 676w

M1-M62 link
412-3w

M3
Road construction 156w, 570w

M6
Planning compensation 4w

McAllion, Mr John
Questions
Industrial disputes, Employment protection 738
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 361-2

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
Banks, Small businesses 224w
Shopping centres, Northern Ireland 355-6

McCartney, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 102-6

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 256, 258
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 466

Macedonia
International assistance 515-6w
Overseas aid 378w
Recognition of states 515-6w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Cervical cancer, Points of order (18:05:93) 157
Questions
Northern Ireland government 289-90w
Overseas loans, Peru 282w

McGeogan Inquiry
see Cervical Smear Test Inquiry

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Employment discrimination, Northern Ireland 296w

***MacGregor, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 589-90, 595-603, 619-20, 626-8, 637-41, 647-9, 703-6, 711-3
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 760-3, 771-2, 774, 781-91, 804-6, 862-4
Questions
British Rail, Pension funds 235-6w
British Rail, Privatisation 412w
Carbon dioxide, Exhaust emission controls 415-6w
Civil service agencies, Privatisation 683-4w
Crossrail 407-8w
Heathrow Airport, Railway network 558
Heathrow Airport, Railway travel 558
Marine Emergency Organisation 332w
Motorways, Road tolls 484w
Railway freight transport, Privatisation 235w
River Dee, Bridges 556
Road construction 564
Road safety, Equipment 555-6
Road tolls 415w
Road traffic control, Cameras 556
Sustainable development 234w
Transport, South East region 409w
Transport policy, Environment protection 415-6w

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 282-4
Questions
Drama, Arts finance 15-7w
Georgia, Human rights 517w

Mackinlay, Mr Andrew
Questions
British Rail, Privatisation 410w
Chevening House, Auctions 122w
Clark, Alan, Telephone tapping 333w
Diethylistilboestrol, Cancer hazards 507w
Diethylistilboestrol, Compensation 508w
Diethylistilboestrol, Drug side effects 506-8w
Diethylistilboestrol, Prescriptions 507w
Diethylistilboestrol, Trade names 508w
Zoos, Export of live animals 364w

***Maclean, Mr David**, Minister for the Environment and Countryside*
Debates etc.
Garages & petrol stations (19:05:93) 346-50
Questions
Air pollution, EC action 178w
Air pollution control, EC action 177w
Association of County Councils, Environment protection 528w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Air conditioning 527w
Chlorofluorocarbons, EC law 366-7w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Refrigerators 365w
Climate, Conferences 356w
Coastal zone management, EC law 98-9w
Countryside Commission 703w
"Digest of Environmental Protection & Water Statistics" 533w
Dog licences 182w
Dogs 182w
Dolphins, Nature conservation 177w

***Maclean, Mr David**—continued*
EC Environment Council 175w
Ecolabelling 908-10
Energy management assistance scheme 617w
Energy research, Combined heat & power 532w
"Energy Use & Energy Efficiency in UK Manufacturing Industry up to the Year 2000" 529w
Environment protection 611w
Environment protection, Children 366w
Environment protection, Civil lisbility 225w
Environment protection, EC law 179w
Environment protection, Government achievements 619w
Environment protection, India 357w
Environment protection, International cooperation 179w
Environment protection, Orders & regulations 619w
Environmental impact assessment, Offices 526-7w
Environmental policy 531-2w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Prosecutions 175w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Publicity 175w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution 354w
Home energy efficiency scheme 175-6w
Incinerators, EC law 173w
Incinerators, Planning permission 173w
Industrial energy consumption 528w
Methane, Tipping of waste 359w
National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Environment protection 365w
Nichols Institute Diagnostics, Radioactive wastes 365w
Non-ionizing radiation, Environmental research 176w
Oceanography, Surveys 180w
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 357w, 919-20
Ozone layer, Health hazards 920-2
Partnership for Change, Conferences 528w
Radioactive waste disposal 904-5
Radioactive waste disposal, Magnox reactors 100w
Radioactive wastes 176-7w
Recycling 356w
Recycling, Local government services 356w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 100w, 904
Sewage, Waste disposal 614w
THORP 610w
Tipping of waste 98w
Tipping of waste, Fees & charges 174-5w
UN Conference on Human Settlements 178-9w
UN Convention on Biological Diversity 180w
Waste management, Licensing 99-101w, 173-4w
Water & sewerage companies, Price increases 357-8w
Water pollution, EC law 354w
Water pollution, Germany 179w
Water supply, Lead pollution 176w
Water supply disconnections, Environmental health 697-8w
Zoos, Export of live animals 364w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Advertising 121w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Questions
Courts, Battered women 16
Fine defaulters, Prison sentences 341w
Fines 340w
Withholding tax, Entertainers 573w

***McLoughlin, Mr Patrick**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Employment*
Questions
Animal experiments, Genetics 216-7w
Armed forces civilians, South West region 525-6w
Asbestos 652-3w

***McLoughlin, Mr Patrick**—continued*
Career development loan scheme, Employment opportunities 217w
Child workers, Conditions of employment 522-3w
Community action 746
Community action, West Midlands 745-6
Day nurseries, West Midlands 525w
Defence contracts, Northern region 248w
Dept of Employment, Civil servants 217w
Dept of Employment, Computer privacy 218-22w
Dept of Employment, Parliamentary questions 130-1w
Dept of Employment, Select Committee reports 248-50w
Disabled workers, Training 739
Disabled workers, Unemployment 621-2w
Dock labour scheme 654w
Employment 464w
Employment level 216w
Employment level, Enterprise zones 127-8w
Employment level, Manufacturing industries 522w
Employment opportunities 525w
Employment opportunities, Cooperatives 132w
Employment schemes 217-8w
Employment schemes, Industrial accidents 315-22w
Employment training 218w
Enterprise training 524-5w
Genetically modified organisms, Licensing 39-40w
Hillingdon Hospital, Industrial health & safety 259-61w
Industrial accidents, Ports 653-4w
Industrial health & safety, EC law 40w
Industrial health & safety, Hazardous materials 217w
Industrial health & safety, Orders & regulations 41w, 127w, 129w
Industrial health & safety, Prosecutions 130w
Industrial health & safety, Radiation hazards 218w
Investors in people 739
Jobplan workshops 521-2w
Labour costs, Manufacturing industries 524w
Manpower Services Commission, Codes of practice 620-1w
Merseyside 131w
Older workers, Take-up of employment 622w
Pay, Sex discrimination 654w
Redundancy 741
Redundancy, Barnsley 741
Sexual harassment 655w
Trzining & enterprise councils, North West region 519w
Training credits 218w
Training credits, Vocational training 520w
Travel-to-work areas 525w
Unemployment 131w, 216w, 526w, 746
Unemployment, Building industry 131w
Unemployment, Graduates 131-2w
Unemployment, Greenwich 519w
Unemployment, Holloway 519-20w
Unemployment, Liverpool Riverside 131w
Unemployment, Men 465w
Unemployment, Merseyside 131w, 747
Unemployment, Northern region 520w
Unemployment, Press releases 526w
Unemployment, Statistics 519w
Unemployment, West Midlands 525w
Unemployment benefits 128w
Women's employment, Sex discrimination 654-5w
Youth employment, Lambeth 520-1w
Youth training 128-9w, 132w, 463-4w
Youth training, Waiting lists 521w
Youth unemployment 132w, 518w
Youth unemployment, Coventry 517w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Questions
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Ambulance services 277-8w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Property transfer 278w

McMaster, Mr Gordon—continued
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Public appointments 277w
British Nuclear Test Veterans' Association 368-9w
British Rail, Accountability 682w
Carpet industry, Scotland 212w
Cervical cancer, Screening 735w
Civil service agencies, Scotland 584-6w
Community care, Finance 273-4w
Community care, Scotland 732w
Credit unions, Scotland 738w
EC grants & loans 369-70w
EC grants & loans, EC countries 580w
Economic growth, Strathclyde 733w
Election expenses, Scotland 735w
Employment by sector, Renfrew 730w
Family doctors, Surgery 496-7w
Fire Services Benevolent Fund, Scotland 727-8w
Food industry, Strathclyde 728w
Forensic science, Scotland 734w
Forestry, Scotland 733w
Gilmour, Raymond, Criminal appeals 269-70w
Government buildings, Access to buildings 734w
Handicapped, Advisory bodies 734w
Handicapped, Social security benefits 556w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Further education colleges 734w
Horticulture, Occupational therapy 728w
Hospices, Children 270w
Hospital visitor benefits, Child patients 635w
House of Commons Commission, House of Commons select committees 484w
Housing improvement, Renfrew District Council 212w
Housing revenue accounts, Renfrew District Council 212w
In vitro fertilisation, Scotland 727w
Infant mortality, Scotland 274-8w
Listed buildings, Renfrew 214w
Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland, Local government constituencies 133w
Members' facilities, Information technology 104-5w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis, Social security benefits 500-1w, 556w
Party conferences, Security 733-4w
Plants, Nature conservation 585-6w
Play groups, Government grants 37w
Playgrounds, Child safety 213-4w
Quarrying, Planning permission 269w
Railway stations, Handicapped 270w
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley, Building repairs 279w
Scottish courts 731-2w
Scottish Homes 279w
Scottish Office, Management consultants 738w
Scottish Office Education Dept, Government grants 211-2w
Scottish Prison Service, Contracts for services 730w
Security equipment, Renfrew 214w
Sites of special scientific interest, Renfrew 213w
Social Fund, Child patients 138w
Solicitor-General for Scotland 729-30w
Sports centres, Urban programme 735w
Textile industry, Strathclyde 728-9w
Toxic shock syndrome 732w
Witnesses 60w
Witnesses, Northern Ireland 158w
Witnesses, Scotland 449w
Youth services, Paisley 214w
Youth training, Renfrewshire 732-3w

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast (17:05:93) 137
Questions
Northern Ireland government 354
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 363

McWilliam, Mr John
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 146

Madden, Mr Max
Questions
Assisted areas 452w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 574
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 150-1
Crime, Racial conflict 338-9w, 435w
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 680w
Forest Moor, Naval bases 681w
Forest Moor, Repairs & maintenance 681w
HIV infection, Elderly 675w
Immigration applications 41-2w
Mattoo, Hamida, Death 660w
Menwith Hill, Defence land 681w
Political prisoners, India 661w
Racial attacks, Crime prevention 239-40w
Racial attacks, Homicide 422w
Racial attacks, Law reform 422w
Textile industry, Clothing industry 221w

Madel, Mr David
Questions
Fire services, Pay 475w

Magazine press
Health education 330w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Charities, Northern Ireland 460w

Magistrates
Ethnic minorities 69w
Greater London 69w

Magistrates' courts
Fees & charges 69w
Information 69w
Redbridge 723w
Rugeley 61w
Snaresbrook 723w
Trials 70-1w

Magnox reactors
Radioactive waste disposal 100w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Ministers, Points of order (27:05:93) 1053
Old people's homes, Points of order (25:05:93) 753
Stobhill Hospital (27:05:93) 1051
Questions
Arms trade, Indonesia 146
Breast cancer 442-4w
Company disclosure of information, Shareholders 224w
Income support, Young people 78w, 309w

Maiden speeches
Butler, Peter (20:05:93) 430-2
Rendel, David (19:05:93) 266-8

Maintenance
Legal aid (24:05:93) 728
Northern Ireland (17:05:93) 130

Maitland, Lady Olga
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 141w
Cancer, Medical treatments 437w
Diplomatic service, Manpower 374w
Health education, Magazine press 330w
Youth training 736

Major, Rt Hon John, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service
Questions
Allitt, Beverley, Inquiries 152-3
Assisted areas, Greater London 367-8
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed forces deployment 156
British Coal Corporation, Pension funds 369w
British Nuclear Test Veterans' Association 368-9w

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
Chevening House, Auctions 122w
Clark, Alan, Telephone tapping 333w
Community care 366-7
Council of Europe, European Convention on Human Rights 370w
Council of Ministers, Voting behaviour 250w
Crossrail 367, 369w
Departmental correspondence, Journalists 250w
Domicil, Law reform 597w
EC grants & loans 369-70w
Economic situation 155w, 365-6, 368
Electoral reform 366
Employment opportunities, Northern region 33-4w
Environmental policy, Government departments 501-2w
European Parliament elections 368w
Government achievements 249w
Greater London 249w
Housing associations, Rented housing 154-5
Intelligence services 122w
Jubilee line 661w
Local government reform, Derbyshire 153
Ministerial policy advisors, Conditions of employment 368w
Ministers, Finance 660w
Nuclear reactors, Decommissioning 661w
Nuclear weapons tests, Exservicemen 364
Official engagements 122w, 250w
Parliamentary questions, District health authorities 660-1w
Political prisoners, India 661w
Post offices, Social security payments 153-4
Prescription charges 364-5
Prime Minister, Computer privacy 33w
Prime Minister, Parliamentary questions 34w
Proportional representation 155
Public expenditure 154
Rushdie, Salman 122w
Schools 661w
Smoke alarms, Public sector housing 502w
Trade barriers 151-2
Treaty on European Union 364
UN Convention on Biological Diversity 155w
Water supply industry, Privatisation 155-6
Water supply industry, Scotland 366
Yugoslavia, Peace keeping operations 369w

Making Belfast work programme
294-6w
Expenditure 296w
Schools 296w

Management consultants
Scottish Office 738w

Management techniques
Company management 639w

Managers
NHS trusts 37w
Training 547w
Wales 547w

Manchester
(17:05:93) 29-70
Benefits Agency district offices 78-9w
Electorate 509w
Urban programme 618w

Manchester Airport
501w

Mandelson, Mr Peter
Questions
British Airways, Competition 579-80w
Dan Air, Takeovers 580w
Local government reform 615w
NHS charges 748
Steetley Magnesia Products 228

Manpower Services Commission
Codes of practice 620-1w

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 302
Questions
Business start-up scheme, North West region 518w

Mans, Mr Keith—continued
Manchester Airport 501w

Mansfield
Enterprise zones 702w

Manual workers
Manufacturing industries 421w

Manufactured exports
343w

Manufactured goods
Balance of trade 334-5w
Overseas trade 343w

Manufactured imports
Import penetration 488w

Manufacturing industries
238-9
Derbyshire 234
East Midlands 234
Employment level 522w
Industrial training 737
Labour costs 524w
Manual workers 421w
Productivity 283w, 502-3w
Teesside 227

Marble Hill House
Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England 17w

Marchington
Fire services 475-6w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 585, 608-11, 629, 673-5, 723, 725-7
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 772, 793-5, 819-20, 827-8, 842, 855
Questions
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 8

Marenbon, John
247-8w

Marine Emergency Organisation
332w

Marine engines
Helicopter carriers 453-4w

Marine fuels
Warships 346w

Market share
110w

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 879-80
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 390, 399
Questions
Training, Young people 745

Marshall, Mr David
Questions
Council tax, Scotland 215w
Deaf, Public telephones 33w
Hospital consultants, Gynaecology 38w
Inner city areas, Glasgow 271w
Kerr Little, Government assistance 497w
Paint ball guns, War games 37-8w
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 137w
Social security payments, Theft 186w
VAT, Fuels 281w
Water charges, Strathclyde Regional Council 211w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Questions
Local government services, Leicestershire County Council 905

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Prostitution, Stamford Hill (18:05:93) 165
Public transport, Greater London (27:05:93) 1083

Marshall, Mr John—continued
Questions
Arab boycott 239-40
Bus services, Contracts for services 1w
Church Commissioners, Publications 13
Fertility, Medical treatments 668w
Grant maintained schools, Wales 49w
Legal aid 15-6
Local government maladministration 913
Nadir, Asil, Bail 565
Northern Ireland government 362-3
Nurses, Manpower 292w
Religious buildings, Property transfer 191w
Royal Free NHS Trust, Hospital patients 575w
Wages councils 736

Marshall, Sir Michael
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 574

Martin, Mr David
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 761, 780
Questions
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 687w

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (27:05:93) 1045-9, 1052
Questions
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 170w, 380w
Palace of Westminster, Manpower 171w
Palace of Westminster, Telephones 651w
Parliamentary parking 24w
Parliamentary questions, Civil service agencies 651w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Questions
Agriculture, Environment protection 543-4w
Defence land 680w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Public access 596w
European fighter aircraft, Defence procurement 139-40

Mass media
EC action (17:05:93) 129-30

Materials
Imports 280-2w

Maternal mortality
28w

Maternity rights
249w

Maternity services
Hospital beds 26w
Scotland 215w

Mates, Mr Michael, Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Debates etc.
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1040-4
Questions
Ballyconnell Canal, EC grants & loans 459-60w
Charities, Northern Ireland 460w
Extortion, Prosecutions 289w
Homicide, Convictions 290w
Northern Ireland Office, Computer privacy 688w
Northern Ireland Office, Select Committee reports 158w
Royal Ulster Constabulary 598w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Average earnings 599w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Religion 598w
Terrorism, Compensation 325-6w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 500w
Witnesses, Northern Ireland 158w

Matra-Hachette
511w

Mattoo, Hamida
Death 660w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian, Minister for Health
Questions
Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs, Public appointments 504w, 576w
Cerebral palsy, Medical research 30w
Chemists shops, West Midlands 261w
Clinical laboratories, Technicians 195w, 579w
Committee on the Review of Medicines, Public appointments 437-40w
Contraceptives, Limited list prescribing 255w, 576w
Dept of Health, Civil service manpower 504w
Diethylistilboestrol, Cancer hazards 507w
Diethylistilboestrol, Compensation 508w
Diethylistilboestrol, Drug side effects 506-8w
Diethylistilboestrol, Prescriptions 507w
Diethylistilboestrol, Trade names 508w
Doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 330w
Drug abuse, Research 508w, 670w
Drug abuse, Young people 579w
Drugs, Packaging 505w
Eye disorders, Health surveys 257w
Eye tests 145-6w
GP fundholders 255w
Health authorities, Merseyside 446-8w
Health education, Manpower 153-4w
Health service staff, Absenteeism 257w
Health service staff, Freedom of expression 577w
Health services, Contracts 256w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 149w
Junior hospital doctors, Manpower 26-8w
Junior hospital doctors, Working hours 257w
Limited list prescribing 330w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 575w
Medical research, Primary health care 506w
Medical treatment abroad, British residents abroad 32w
Migraine, Prescription drugs 152-3w
NHS trusts, Expenditure 576w
NHS trusts, Members' constituency work 508w
Pharmaceutical services, Chemists shops 33w
Pharmacists, Pay 31w, 257w
Pink, Graham, Stockport Health Authority 441w
Prescription charges, Pregnant women 509w
Prescription charges exemptions 256w, 508w
Prescription Pricing Authority, Finance 148w
Public Health Guidance Review Committee 151w
Skin disorders, Medical treatments 444w
Triazolam, Drug side effects 577w
Wellhouse NHS Trust, Manpower 505w

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Points of order (25:05:93) 753
Questions
Flags, Northern Ireland 325w
Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1992 599w
Northern Ireland government 289-90w, 352-4, 357-8, 362-3
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 361-3
Official visits, USA 291w
Police custody, Complaints against police 293-4w
Police interrogation, Rights of accused 292-3w
Police interrogation, Video recordings 294w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 353-4

Meacher, Mr Michael
Questions
South Africa, Overseas aid 569

Meale, Mr Alan
Questions
Exhibitions, Upper Waiting Hall 170w

Mechanical metrology laboratory
265-6w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate 263-5w

Mechanical metrology laboratory—continued
Privatisation 263-5w

Medical appeal tribunals
Scotland 439w

Medical Effects of Air Pollution Committee
28-9w

Medical equipment
Charitable donations 675w
Lung diseases 575w

Medical malpractice
329w
Costs 147w

Medical records
Computer privacy 194w
Data Protection Registrar 194w
Ownership 329w

Medical research
Cerebral palsy 30w
Mental illness 32w
Nervous system disorders 311w
Primary health care 506w
Wales 311w

Medical treatment abroad
British residents abroad 32w

Medical treatments
Cancer 437w
Fertility 578w, 668w
Skin disorders 444w

Medicines Commission
437-40w
Bovine somatotropin 114w

Medicines Control Agency
437-40w

Mellor, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1057-8, 1060-1

Members' constituency work
NHS trusts 508w

Members' correspondence
Mohammed, Abdullahi 341w
Mortgage relief 106w

Members' facilities
Information technology 104-5w

Members' interests
Advisory bodies 662w

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (26:05:93) 968, 985

Members' visits abroad
EC institutions 571w
Taxation 571w

Men
Unemployment 465w

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
Codes of practice 30w, 195w

Mental health services
Child abuse 338-9w
Young offenders 436w

Mental hospitals
Hospital closures 667-8w

Mental illness
Elderly 193w
Medical research 32w
Surveys 193w

Mentally disadvantaged
Council tax exemptions 532-3w, 555-6w
Disability living allowance 77w

Menwith Hill
Defence land 681w

Mercenaries
Croatia 514w
Yugoslavia 517w

Merchant, Mr Piers
Questions
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 359

Mercury Communications
651w

Mergers
Aerospace industry 511w
Observer 691w

Merseyside
131w, 232-3
Health authorities 446-8w, 670-5w
NHS trusts 446-8w
Unemployment 131w, 747

Merseyside Development Corporation
177-8w
Finance 614w

Merseyside Integrated Development Operation
620w

Methane
Tipping of waste 359w

Metropolitan Police
Computer privacy 477-8w

MI5
(18:05:93) 169-70

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 127
Questions
Arbitration schemes 156-7w, 233-4w, 567-8w
Cardiff Prison, Prison education services 207-9w
Civil servants, Contracts for services 565w
Contracts for services, Employment protection 97w, 209w, 241w
Drug abuse, Research 508w, 670w
Drug abuse, Young people 477w, 566w, 579w, 720w
Drug crimes, Confiscation orders 719-20w
Fines 209-10w, 339-40w, 428w, 567w
Fines, Disposable income 241w, 433w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 211w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Wales 10
Home Office, Contracts for services 427w, 475-6w
Housing estates, Repairs & maintenance 917
Mines in the next century 629w
Motor vehicle theft, Convictions 428-34w
NHS Joint Staff Consultative Councils, Wales 556w
Police 340-1w, 427w
Prison Service, Contracts for services 426w
Prisons, Civil servants' business appointments 565w
Probation & aftercare, Voluntary organisations 339w
Reparation by offenders, Scotland 271-2w
Safer cities scheme 206w
Safer cities scheme, Finance 206-7w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Contracts for services 97w
United Kingdom Passport Agency, Management 427w
Victim support schemes, Government grants 96-7w
Youth unemployment 739-40

Michie, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 277-9
Questions
Empty housing, Repairs & maintenance 618-9w

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Hospital patients 196w

Mid Glamorgan
Employment level 49w

Midland Metro Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

Midland Metro (No 3) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

Midwives
Career structure 145w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast 687-9w
Manpower 255w

Migraine
Prescription drugs 152-3w

Milburn, Mr Alan
Questions
Older workers, Take-up of employment 622w
Persistent vegetative state 446w
Private patients 260w
Railway track, Vandalism 685w
Regional aid 119-20w
Rental deposits 636w
Severe hardship provision, Durham County 694-7w
Travel-to-work areas 525w
Unemployment, Northern region 520w
Unemployment benefits, Occupational pensions 562-3w

Military aid to civil community
Helicopters 142w

Military aircraft
Bosnia-Herzegovina 84w, 141w, 344-5w, 371-2w, 624w, 681w

Military discipline
Falkland Islands 234w

Military intervention
USA 163w

Milk Marketing Board
Property transfer 25w

Miller, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 100-3
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 931-2
Questions
A550, Road accidents 482w
A550, Road construction 481-3w
A550, Road traffic 481w, 483w
A550, Road traffic control 482w
Bypasses 483w
Carbon dioxide, Exhaust emission controls 415-6w
Road construction, Public inquiries 570-1w

Milligan, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 387, 398
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 591, 594, 608, 611-4
Questions
Youth unemployment, Hampshire 742

Mine service centres
229w

Mines
629w
Cambodia 103w
Treaties 101w

Mines in the next century
629w

Minesweepers
623w
Rosyth Dockyard 144w

Ministerial policy advisors
Conditions of employment 368w

Ministerial statements
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 923-37
Whales (17:05:93) 19-28

Ministers
Finance 660w

Ministers' domestic visits
Upper Bann 501w

Ministers' visits abroad
Abu Dhabi 487-8w
Diplomatic relations 41w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
543w
Computer privacy 171w
Parliamentary questions 25w
Science & technology policy 596-7w
Select Committee reports 595-6w

Ministry of Defence
Computer privacy 344w
Parliamentary questions 83-4w

Miscarriages of justice
Compensation 61-2w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 412, 425, 452-3
Questions
Audio equipment, Retail prices 110w
Balance of payments, Tourist industry 111w
Balance of trade, Manufactured goods 334-5w
British nationality 196w
Citizen's Charter 85w
Economic & monetary union 112w
Economic situation 155w
Employment level 216w
Employment level, Manufacturing industries 522w
Exchange rate mechanism 110w
Exchange rates 110-1w, 334w, 420-1w
Exchange rates, Industrial production 110w
Financial markets, Self-regulatory system 333-4w
Holidays abroad, Price increases 112-3w, 160-1w, 285w
House prices, Price increases 111-2w
Import penetration 662w
Imports 223w
Imports, Materials 280-2w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 418w
Insider trading 112-3w
Interest rates 161w, 281-2w
Manufactured exports 343w
Manufactured goods, Overseas trade 343w
Manufactured imports, Import penetration 488w
Manufacturing industries, Manual workers 421w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 283w, 502-3w
Minesweepers 623w
Press, Privacy 189w
Public defenders 361w
Public lavatories, Sleeping rough 193w, 356-7w
Public sector borrowing requirement 420w
Railway fares 87-8w
Rents 335w
Retail price index 160w, 280w, 663w
Retail price index, Holidays 161w
Retail price index, Holidays abroad 335-6w
Sterling, Exchange rates 421w
Tourism 244w
Tourist industry 126w
Trade barriers 488-9w
Water & sewerage companies, Price increases 357-8w

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 673, 709-10
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 795-6
Questions
Caravan sites, Travelling people 616w

Moate, Sir Roger
Questions
Helicopters, Military aid to civil community 142w
Hormone treatments, Counselling 668-9w

Moate, Sir Roger—continued
Hormone treatments, Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 669w

Mohammed, Abdullahi
Members' correspondence 341w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Questions
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 360

Monopolies
Ice cream 120-1w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission
120-1w, 691w

Monro, Sir Hector, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 888-90
Questions
Environment protection, Scotland 216w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Disclosure of information 273w
Forestry, Scotland 733w
Forestry Commission 736-7w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 584w
Forestry Commission, Land ownership & tenure 351w, 736w
Forestry Commission, Nature conservation 737-8w
Forests, Access to countryside 584w, 736w
Kerr Little, Government assistance 497w
Listed buildings, Renfrew 214w
Opencast mining, Armadale 271w
Plants, Nature conservation 585-6w
Scottish Office Agriculture & Fisheries Dept, Manpower 497-8w
Seals, Nature conservation 689w
Sites of special scientific interest, Renfrew 213w
Slaughterhouses, Scotland 586w
Water charges, Lothian 269w
Water charges, Strathclyde Regional Council 211w

Montenegro
Sanctions 373w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Debates etc.
Hospitals, Trafford (18:05:93) 161-3
Questions
Rolling stock, Leaseback arrangements 410w
Training & enterprise councils, North West region 519w

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 925-7

Moorings
(17:05:93) 71-114

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 116, 121-9
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 949, 956, 960-8
Questions
BAOR, Advisory services 455w
Bridges, Design 412w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation 712-3w
Dentists, Family health services authorities 470-1w
Disability working allowance, Social security claims 305w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 7-8
Hospitals, Barry 715w
Industrial production, Wales 638w
Insurance, British residents abroad 541w
Integrated administration & control system, Wales 712w
NHS trusts, Employment protection 716w
Non-departmental public bodies, Public appointments 465w, 714-6w

Morgan, Mr Rhodri—continued
One stop shop initiative, Wales 470w
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff, Orthopaedics 714w
Town & country planning, Wales 714w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 888-9
Social security payments, Public petitions (25:05:93) 893
Questions
Animal diseases, Notifiable diseases 593w
Export of live animals, EC internal trade 24w
Flood defence committees, Public appointments 362w
Forestry Commission, Nature conservation 737-8w
Housing construction 916
Slaughterhouses 593-4w
Slaughterhouses, Northern Ireland 689w
Slaughterhouses, Scotland 586w
Slaughterhouses, Wales 648w

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Private Members' bills (18:05:93) 184
Questions
Elder abuse 441w
Further education, Handicapped students 492w
Handicapped, Community care 506w
"Paying for Independence" 561w

Morris, Ms Estelle
Questions
Educational assessment, Departmental publications 23w
National vocational qualifications 168w
Peace keeping operations, UK contributions 141w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry. Points of order (25:05:93) 753
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 1004-10
Questions
Mortgage interest rates, Local authorities 328w
Pensions, Social security payments 185w
Pharmacists, Pay 257w

Mortgage defaulters
Repossession orders 310-1w
Wales 310-1w

Mortgage interest rates
Local authorities 328w
Wales 328w

Mortgage relief
534w, 665-6w
Low incomes 419w
Members' correspondence 106w

Mortgages
Income support 72w, 558-60w, 693w, 706w
Wales 645w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Civil service dispersal, Expenditure 535w
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee 440-1w
Housing associations, Housing construction 905-6
National Weights & Measures Laboratory, Performance standards 690w
Observer, Mergers 691w
Rural planning, Northern Ireland 290w
Tax allowances, Relocation of employees 572w

Motor vehicle theft
65w
Convictions 428-34w
Crime prevention 93-4w
Young offenders 428-34w

Motorway service areas
Automobile Association 89w
Road signs 684w

Motorway service areas—continued
Royal Automobile Club 89w

Motorways
Road tolls 484w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Questions
Contracts for services, Cost effectiveness 322-3w
Pay, Sex discrimination 654w
Sexual harassment 655w
Women's employment, Sex discrimination 654-5w

Mozambique
Democracy 48-9w
Elections 48-9w
Human rights 48w
Overseas aid 19-20w

Mozambique National Resistance
see RENAMO

Mudie, Mr George
Questions
Drug crimes, Proceeds of crime 239-40w
Seized Assets Fund 197-203w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Questions
Home Office, Pathology 95-6w
Indonesia, Overseas loans 252w
Parsons, Brian, Convictions 93w

Multiple births
444-5w
Northern Ireland 501-2w
Scotland 498-500w

Multiple occupation
Licensing 58w

Murphy, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 950
Questions
Education, Wales 2-3

Museums & galleries
Government grants 189-90w
Purchase grants 479w
Repairs & maintenance 189-90w

Myalgic encephalomyelitis
Northern Ireland 500-1w
Social security benefits 500-1w, 556w

Nadir, Asil
46w
Bail 564-5

Nagorno Karabakh
Peace negotiations 514-5w

Narcotics
Drug abuse 336w

Narmada dam
591-2w

National Board for Crime Prevention
725-6w

National Consumer Council
International trade 227w

National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Environment protection 365w

National Council of Victim Support
96-7w

National Curriculum Council
608w

National Health Service (Fund-Holding Practices) Regulations 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 583

National Heritage Memorial Fund
Purchase grants 479w

National insurance
Administrative costs 635-6w

National insurance contributions
Self-employed 183-4w

National lottery
(17:05:93) 29-70, 190w
Consultants 190-1w

National Power
693w

National Railway Museum
(25:05:93) 758-874

National Rivers Authority
8-9, 25-6w, 617w

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
255-6w

National Union of Civil & Public Servants
417w

National vocational qualifications
100-1w, 168w, 744-5

National Weights & Measures Laboratory
Performance standards 690w
Privatisation 690w

NATO
79-81w, 141w
Armed forces strength 454-6w

Naturalisation
Administrative delays 567w

Nature conservation
Dolphins 177w
Forestry Commission 737-8w
Planning permission 551-2w
Plants 585-6w
Seals 689w
Wales 551-2w

Naval bases
Forest Moor 681w

Naval Support Command
266w

Navy
Educational qualifications 628-9w
Engineering education 628w
Exhibitions 510-1w

Navy strength
143

Needham, Mr Richard, Minister for Trade
Questions
Arab boycott 239-40
Balance of trade 224w, 225
British Aerospace, Broughton 237
Capital taxes 225
Electrical industry, Exports 221-2w
Export controls, Codes of practice 342w
Export promotion 222w
Export promotion, Government assistance 237
Exports 224
Imports 223w
Manufactured exports 343w
Manufactured goods, Overseas trade 343w
Manufactured imports, Import penetration 488w
National Consumer Council, International trade 227w
Overseas investment, Croatia 488w
Overseas trade, Croatia 121w
Overseas trade, Cyprus 238
Overseas trade, Israel 116w
Overseas Trade Service, Manpower 236-7
Regional aid, EC countries 347-8w
Textile industry, Trade fairs 118w
Trade barriers 488-9w
Trade fairs, Government grants 118w
Ucar Carbon 224-5

Negative equity
366w
Wales 646w

Negligence
Handicapped children 170w, 194w, 361w
Wales 170w

Nelson, Mr Anthony, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Audio equipment, Retail prices 110w
Balance of payments, Tourist industry 111w
Balance of trade, Manufactured goods 334-5w
Banks, Licensing 334w
Credit unions, Scotland 738w
Debts, Africa 109w
Economic & monetary union 112w
Exchange rate mechanism 110w
Exchange rates 110-1w, 334w, 420-1w
Exchange rates, Industrial production 110w
Family income, Nottinghamshire 284w
Family income, Tax burden 284-5w
Financial markets, Self-regulatory system 333-4w
Financial Services Act 1986 541w
Holidays abroad, Price increases 112-3w, 160-1w, 285w
House prices, Price increases 111-2w
Import penetration 662w
Imports, Materials 280-2w
Income tax, Tax yields 665w
Insider trading 112-3w
Insurance, British residents abroad 541w
Interest rates 161w, 281-2w
Manufacturing industries, Manual workers 421w
Manufacturing industries, Productivity 283w
Overseas loans, Peru 282w
Public sector borrowing requirement 420w
Rents 335w
Retail price index 160w, 280w, 663w
Retail price index, Holidays 161w
Retail price index, Holidays abroad 335-6w
Securities & Investments Board, Self-regulating organisations 665w
Sterling, Exchange rates 421w
Treasury, Civil service dispersal 421w
Treasury, Computer privacy 282w
Treasury, Operating costs 110w
Treasury, Parliamentary questions 14w

Nervous system disorders
Medical research 311w

Netherlands
Emergency planning 204w

Network SouthEast
Fares 553-4
Railway travel 555

Neubert, Sir Michael
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Yugoslavia 144w
GATT 223-4w
Jobplan workshops 520w
Jubilee line 561
Local government finance 612w
London Underground 416w
Waste management, Licensing 100-1w

New businesses
524-5w
Training & enterprise councils 551w
Wales 554w

Newham
Road construction 682-3w

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Recess motions (18:05:93) 198-202
Questions
Aid financed trade, Developing countries 751-2
Arms to Iraq Inquiry 750
British Rail, Finance 750
Business questions 372-9
Business statements 369-72
EC enlargement 749-50
EC internal relations 748-9
EC law, Subsidiarity 750-1

Newton, Rt Hon Tony—continued
Lambeth Borough Council, Local government corruption 750
Manchester Airport 501w
NHS charges 748
Official engagements 502w
Overseas trade, Developing countries 752
Public expenditure 749
Tax rates & bands 751

NHS
Land values 707w

NHS charges
748

NHS complaints
670w

NHS Estates Wales
707w

NHS internal market
256w, 440w

NHS Joint Staff Consultative Councils
Wales 556w

NHS Management Executive
151w, 258w
Manpower 504w

NHS Management Functions & Manpower Review
151w

NHS review
437w

NHS trusts
Administrative costs 260w
Costs 29w
Directors 191w
Employment protection 716w
Expenditure 575w
Hospital consultants 709w
Industrial relations 134-5w
Managers 37w
Members' constituency work 508w
Merseyside 446-8w
Scotland 37w
Wales 3, 134-5w, 709w, 716w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 246
Questions
EC internal relations 748-9
Ports, Privatisation 290w

Nichols Institute Diagnostics
Radioactive wastes 365w

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bureaucracy (18:05:93) 170-4
Questions
Agricultural land, Local government land 542w
Hydrographic Office, Performance standards 623w
One stop shop initiative 221w
Sewage, Waste disposal 614w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 513-9
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 935

Nigeria
Overseas aid 376w

Night flying
Heathrow Airport (27:05:93) 1054-63
London airports 685w

NIREX
see United Kingdom NIREX

Nitrate sensitive areas
Wales 711w

No-fault compensation
Handicapped children 195w

Non-departmental public bodies
Pay 366w
Public appointments 465w, 714-6w
Wales 545w
Working hours 366w

Non-Domestic Rating (No 2) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

Non-fossil fuel obligation
Scotland 351w

Non-governmental organisations
515w, 658-9w
Family planning 590-2w
UN Development Programme 101w
UNICEF 101w

Non-ionizing radiation
Cancer 147w
Environmental research 176w

Norfolk
Storms 60w

NORMIDTEC
739

***Norris, Mr Steve**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Transport*
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1060-3
Public transport, Greater London (27:05:93) 1083-6
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 723
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 848-50, 855
Questions
Air safety, Baggage allowances 1w
Bus services, Contracts for services 1w
Bus services, Greater London 1-2w
Crossrail 408w
Crossrail, Private investment 569-70w
Dept of Transport, Computer privacy 234w
Dept of Transport, Parliamentary questions 3w
East London river crossing 682w
East London river crossing, Costs 571w
East London river crossing, Environmental impact assessment 90-1w
East London river crossing, Oxleas Wood 4w, 556-7
Heathrow Airport, Air routes 90w
Jubilee line 558-61
London airports, Night flying 685w
London Buses, Privatisation 409w
London Regional Transport, Crimes of violence 407w
London Underground 416w
Priority routes, Bus services 407w
Railway network, East London 332w
Railway network, Greater London 416w
River Clyde, Submarines 86w
River Thames, Bridges 3-4w
Road closures, Greenford 569w
Road construction, Newham 682-3w
Road traffic, Greater London 408-9w
Roads, Greater London 569w
Sea rescue, Devon 237w
Shipping, Spain 332w
Tanker ships, Sea navigation 85-6w
Taxis, Licensing 2-3w
Transport of radioactive materials, Plutonium 683w
Transport of radioactive materials, Sea transport 89w, 683w
Transport supplementary grants, Greater London 91-2w
Travel cards, Greater London 571w
Wastes, Freight transport 87w

North Sea
419w

North Wales
Assisted areas 741-2
Road construction 50w

North West region
384-5w
Blind 505w

North West region—continued
Business start-up scheme 518w
Pensioners 631-2w
Training 739
Training & enterprise councils 519w

Northern Ireland
361-2, 364, 459-60w, 598-9w
Average earnings 599w
Bombings (24:05:93) 581, (27:05:93) 1035-44
Brook Advisory Centres 360-1
Building regulations 461-2w
Charities 460w
Dyslexia 292w
Educational assessment 159w
Electoral register (26:05:93) 942
Employment discrimination 296w
Energy prices 354-5
Extortion 289w
Family planning 361
Fire prevention 460-1w
Fire regulations 462-3w
Flags 325w
Food poisoning 688w
Health services 689w
Hearing aids 160w
Hospital doctors 158w
Hostels 462w, 500w
Legislative process 292w
Maintenance (17:05:93) 130
Multiple births 501-2w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis 500-1w
Nurses 292w
Play groups 158w
Police interrogation 292-4w
Police misconduct 293-4w
Ports 290w
Religious education 291-2w
Residential care 292w
Retail trade 356
Rural planning 290w
Shopping centres 355-6
Slaughterhouses 689w
Social security payments 687-8w
Sunday trading 363
Tax allowances 664w
Terrorism 325-6w, 352-4, 500w
Tourism 291w, 358-9
Travel to interview scheme 461w, 597-8w
Unemployment 359-60
Water pollution 290w
Witnesses 158w

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1992
Questions
599w

Northern Ireland government
289-90w, 352-4, 357-8, 362-3
Political parties 361-3

Northern Ireland health & social services boards
158w, 689w

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
462w

Northern Ireland Office
Computer privacy 688w
Select Committee reports 158w

Northern Ireland Rate Collection Agency
Performance standards 326w

Northern region
Defence contracts 248w
Educational finance 384-5w
Employment opportunities 33-4w
Railway electrification 85w, 89w
Unemployment 520w

Northern Regional Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 578w

Notifiable diseases
Animal diseases 593w

Nottinghamshire
Family income 284w
Railway network 2w, 414w

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
661w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
UK delegations 230w, 678-9w

Nuclear power
Indonesia 590w

Nuclear power stations
EC action (26:05:93) 1015

Nuclear reactors
Aldermaston 344w, 661w
Decommissioning 344w, 661w
Harmonisation of standards 487w

Nuclear safeguards
EC law 348w

Nuclear safety
486-7w
Central Europe 487w
Dockyards 509w
Eastern Europe 487w
EC action 341w
Rosyth Dockyard (18:05:93) 211-22

Nuclear submarines
Dockyards (18:05:93) 211-22
Shipbuilding 509w

Nuclear weapons
Transport of radioactive materials 81w, 230w

Nuclear weapons deployment
Russia 454w

Nuclear weapons policy
146-7, 454w

Nuclear weapons tests
Compensation 364
Exservicemen 364

Nursery nurses
Nursery schools 508-9w

Nursery schools
Greater London 381-4w
Nursery nurses 508-9w

Nurses
Career structure 145w, 498w
Manpower 292w
Northern Ireland 292w
Scotland 498w

Nurses' training
Psychiatric nurses 36w
Scotland 36-7w

Objects in lieu of tax
480w

O'Brien, Mr Mike
Questions
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Annual reports 69w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Assisted areas, Wakefield (25:05:93) 896-7
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 247
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 588
Questions
Health services, Rural areas 689w
Housing associations, Rented housing 154-5

Obscene Publications Act 1959
Questions
62w, 425w

Observer
Mergers 691w

Occupational pensions
139w
Civil servants 534w
Unemployment 637w
Unemployment benefits 562-3w

Occupational therapy
Horticulture 728w

Oceanography
Surveys 180w

Offensive weapons
Import controls 161w

Office for Standards in Education
168w, 492w, 607-8w

Office of Public Service & Science
Contracts for services 363-4w

Office of the Chief Adjudication Officer
76-7w

Offices
Environmental impact assessment 526-7w
Procurement Executive 83w

Official engagements
122w, 250w, 502w

Official Report
CD-ROM 380w

Official visits
Croatia 163w
Cyprus 157w
Royal family 347w
St Helena 516w
USA 291w

Offshore safety
Enforcement 622-3w

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Questions
Defence procurement, Shipbuilding 142w
Overseas trade, Cyprus 238

Oil rigs
Cammell Laird 232-3

Older workers
Hard core unemployed 622w
Take-up of employment 622w

One stop shop initiative
221w, (21:05:93) 481-540, 581-2w
Wales 470w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Pension funds 583-4w
Energy policy 233-4
Tipping of waste 98w

Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 417-8

Open prisons
722-3w

Opencast mining
Armadale 271w
Planning appeals 351w
Planning permission 368w
Production 701w
Scotland 351w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 245
Questions
Defence expenditure 142w
Ecolabelling 909

Opposition days
Defence industries (19:05:93) 297-341
Social security payments (19:05:93) 245-96

Orders & regulations
Environment protection 619w
Industrial health & safety 40-1w, 127w, 129w, 621w

Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland
Performance standards 326w

Origin marking
Leather & fur industries 34w

Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 32, 50-2

Orthopaedics
Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff 714w

Ottaway, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Business premises, Rents (18:05:93) 158-60
Upwards-only Rent Review Clauses (Abolition) Bill, 1R (18:05:93) 158-60
Questions
Roads, Greater London 555

Outer London boroughs
Sleeping rough 701w

Overseas aid
Africa 18w, 376w
Bosnia-Herzegovina 377-8w
British dependent territories 103w
Cambodia 103w
Croatia 348w
Democracy 570
East Timor 104w
Expenditure 21w, 103w
Family planning 252w
Indonesia 590w, 658-9w
Macedonia 378w
Mozambique 19-20w
Nigeria 376w
Russia 375w
St Helena 589-90w
South Africa 481w, 568-9
Sudan 567

Overseas Development Administration
349w

Overseas diplomatic estate
375w

Overseas investment
Croatia 488w
Personal income 572w

Overseas loans
Indonesia 252w
Peru 282w

Overseas Projects Board
(21:05:93) 481-540

Overseas trade
Croatia 121w
Cyprus 238
Developing countries 752
Israel 116w
Manufactured goods 343w
Russia 236

Overseas Trade Service
Manpower 236-7

Overseas workers
Taxation 572w

Ownership
Medical records 329w

Oxford University
Fees & charges 332-3w

Oxleas Wood
90-1w
East London river crossing 4w, 556-7

Ozone layer
Air pollution control 357w, 919-20
Health hazards 920-2

Package holidays
EC law 450w

Packaging
Drugs 505w
Germany 118w

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Business questions 373
Travel agents, Insolvency 226-7

Paint ball guns
War games 37-8w

Paisley
Cervical cancer 735w
Listed buildings 214w

Paisley—continued
Sites of special scientific interest 213w
Youth services 214w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 276-7
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1035-40
Early day motions, Points of order (27:05:93) 1023
Standing Order No 20 applications, Points of order (24:05:93) 582
Questions
Belfast Airport, Air fares 358-9
Brook Advisory Centres, Northern Ireland 361
Business questions 374-5

Palace of Westminster
Building regulations 171w
Fire regulations 171w
Manpower 171w
Telephones 651w

Parent & child
Child abuse 255-6w

Parental contributions
Assisted places scheme 272w, 602w

Parliamentary constituencies
Wales 237w

Parliamentary data & video network
104-5w

Parliamentary parking
24w

Parliamentary privilege
Speaker's rulings & statements (24:05:93) 583

Parliamentary questions
Civil service agencies 72-3w, 651w
Dept for Education 23w
Dept of Employment 130-1w
Dept of Health 30-1w
Dept of National Heritage 123w
Dept of Social Security 77-8w
Dept of the Environment 59w
Dept of Trade & Industry 343-4w
Dept of Transport 3w
District health authorities 660-1w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 48w
Home Office 62-3w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 25w
Ministry of Defence 83-4w
Prime Minister 34w
Scottish health boards 660-1w
Social Security Benefits Agency 72-3w
Treasury 14w

Parry, Mr Robert
Questions
Airports, Liverpool 225w
City challenge, Liverpool 59w
Community development, Liverpool 182w
Customs & Excise, Civil service dispersal 113-4w
Departmental correspondence, Hong Kong 210w
Merseyside 131w
St George's Hall Liverpool, Government grants 59w
Unemployment, Building industry 131w
Unemployment, Liverpool Riverside 131w
Unemployment, Merseyside 131w, 747

Parsons, Brian
Convictions 93w

Particle Physics & Astronomy Research Council
(26:05:93) 923-37

Partnership for Change
Conferences 528w

Part-time employment
Wales 329w

Party conferences
Scotland 733-4w
Security 733-4w

Patents
Genetic engineering 227-8w

Pathology
Home Office 95-6w

Patient's Charter
7, 254-5w

Patients' transport
Hospitals 670w

***Patten, Rt Hon John**, Secretary of State for Education*
Questions
Higher education, Citizen's Charter 248w
Teacher training 492-3w

Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Heathrow Airport, Night flying (27:05:93) 1058-9

Pawsey, Mr James
Questions
Electrical industry, Exports 221-2w
Water charges, Lothian 269w

Pay incentives
Employment Service local offices 523-4w
Further education colleges 279-80w

Pay settlements
Public sector 536-7w

"Paying for Independence"
561w

Peace keeping operations
Armed forces deployment 149
Bosnia-Herzegovina 253w, 373-4w
Croatia 163-4w
UK contributions 42w, 141w
United Nations 42w, 46-7w
Yugoslavia 369w, 372w

Peace negotiations
Bosnia-Herzegovina 371-2w, 574w
Cambodia 46w
Nagorno Karabakh 514-5w
Yugoslavia 372w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 882-4, 889
Questions
Milk Marketing Board, Property transfer 25w
Opencast mining, Planning permission 368w

Peat
596w

Pembrokeshire
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 135-6w

Penalty fares
(24:05:93) 584-727

Pendle
Breast cancer 255w
Racial attacks 718w
Television reception 599w

Pendry, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 36-46, 53, 56
Questions
Educational assessment, Costs 495w
National lottery, Consultants 190-1w

Pension funds
637w
British Coal Corporation 223w, 369w, 450w, 583-4w
British Rail 235-6w, 570w

Pension Law Review Committee
637w

Pensioners
Concessionary fares 561-2
Hospital discharges 194w
Income support 631-2w
North West region 631-2w
Prescription charges 509w

Pensions
Early retirement 637w
EC countries 187w
European Parliament members 161-2w
Social security payments 185-7w

Performing arts
Wales 647w

Persistent vegetative state
446w

Personal income
Overseas investment 572w

Personal tax allowances
572w
Widows 533-4w

Peru
Overseas loans 282w

Pesticides
595w

Petrol
Garages & petrol stations (19:05:93) 342-50

Petroleum exploration
Liverpool Bay 232-3
Petroleum revenue tax 419w
Tax allowances 537-8w

Petroleum revenue tax
Petroleum exploration 419w
Tax reform 419w
Tax yields 15w

Pharmaceutical services
Chemists shops 33w

Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee
676w

Pharmacies
Family doctors 467-8w
Wales 467-8w

Pharmacists
Pay 31w, 52-3w, 257w, 312-3w, 639w, 676w
Wales 52-3w, 312-3w, 639w

Photographs
Cheque cards 240-1w

Pickles, Mr Eric
Questions
Council tax, Lambeth Borough Council 910
Deregulation initiative 148
"Tenant Involvement Consultation Paper" 702-3w

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Garages & petrol stations (19:05:93) 342-4
Questions
Armed forces housing 142w
Hospital discharges, Pensioners 194w
Northern Ireland government, Political parties 362
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits reductions 139w
Standard spending assessments, Pre-school education 611w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 79-80
Questions
Estate Action 917-8
South Africa, Democracy 568

Pink, Graham
Stockport Health Authority 441w

Planning
Local government reform 135w

Planning appeals
Legal costs 352w
Opencast mining 351w
Scotland 352w

Planning compensation
M6 4w

Planning permission
Hostels 57w
Housing construction 58w, 357w
Incinerators 173w
Nature conservation 551-2w
Opencast mining 368w
Quarrying 269w
Sussex 58w
Transport 237w
Wales 646w

Plants
Nature conservation 585-6w
Scotland 585-6w

Play groups
Government grants 22-3w, 37w, 147-8w, 158w
Northern Ireland 158w
Scotland 37w

Playgrounds
Child safety 213-4w
Scotland 213-4w

Playhouse Theatre Liverpool
125-6w

Plutonium
Japan 487w
Sellafield 225-6w
Transport of radioactive materials 89w, 156w, 683w
Trawsfynydd power station 638w

Plymouth City Council
373-4

Plymouth Development Corporation
614w

Poetry
Curriculum 495w

Point of Ayr
Power stations 546w

Polaris
Operating costs 79-80w

Police
340-1w, 427w, 565w
Computer applications 724w
Evidence 425-6w
Manpower 566w
Private sector 210w
Scotland 584w
Wales 648w

Police authorities
565w, 725w
Accountability 93w
Management 567w
Staffordshire 93w

Police custody
Complaints against police 293-4w

Police interrogation
Northern Ireland 292-4w
Rights of accused 292-3w
Video recordings 294w

Police misconduct
Northern Ireland 293-4w

Police records
Computer privacy 338w

Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry
61w
Scotland 588w

Political parties
Northern Ireland government 361-3

Political prisoners
India 661w

Political refugees
Angola 425w
Immigrant detainees 434w

Polly Peck
Serious Fraud Office 85w

Population
County councils 367-8w

Pornography
Prosecutions 425w

Porter, Mr David
Questions
Dept of Trade & Industry, Civil service manpower 452w
Employment 464w
Fines 65w
Fisheries, Civil service manpower 362-3w, 470w
Scottish Office Agriculture & Fisheries Dept, Manpower 497-8w

Portillo, Rt Hon Michael, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Civil service, Labour costs 666w
Civil service dispersal, Expenditure 535w
Crossrail 536w
Economic policy, Greater London 417w
Empty housing, House purchase 534-5w
European Parliament members, Pensions 161-2w
Government departments, Administrative costs 664-5w
Hard core unemployed 419w
International Military Services, Government shareholding 418w
Local government borrowing, Water supply 14w
Occupational pensions, Civil servants 534w
Public sector, Pay settlements 536-7w
Public sector borrowing abroad 667w
Public sector earnings 536-8w
Public service pensions 664w

Ports
Industrial accidents 653-4w
Northern Ireland 290w
Privatisation 290w

Post Office
228w

Post office closures
228w

Post offices
Social security payments 137w, 153-4, 228w, 631w, (25:05:93) 893

Post traumatic stress disorder
Counselling 446w

Postal rates
Inland Revenue 419w

Potatoes
EC action 171-2w

Poultry meat
(27:05:93) 1087-94

Poverty
376w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Crime (18:05:93) 181-5
Drug abuse (18:05:93) 176
Questions
Business questions 378
Contempt of court 566

Powell, Mr William
Debates etc.
Bureaucracy (18:05:93) 172-3
War crimes, Bosnia-Herzegovina (18:05:93) 178-81
Questions
Public expenditure 154

Power stations
Coal consumption 693w
Connah's Quay 546w

Power stations—continued
Point of Ayr 546w

PowerGen
693w

Pregnant women
Dismissal 467w
Employment protection 321w
Income support 298w
Prescription charges 509w
Unfair dismissal 249w
Wales 467w
Youth training 544w

Prentice, Mrs Bridget
Questions
Africa, Overseas aid 18w
Assisted areas, Greater London 367-8
Debts, Africa 109w
European Convention on Human Rights 346-7w
Northern Ireland government 352-3
Nursery schools, Greater London 381-4w
Railway travel, Commuters 553-4
Standard spending assessments 611w
SubSaharan Africa, Economic situation 19w
Youth services, Local government services 22w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 255w
British Rail, Finance 750
Concessionary television licences, Residential care 123w
Eggs, Food labelling 242-3w
Navy strength 143
Racial attacks, Pendle 718w
Set-aside schemes, Land use 243w
Television reception 480w
Television reception, Pendle 599w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 228-9
Textile industry, Trade fairs 118w
Trade fairs, Government grants 118w
Whitefield School Nelson, Dipetheria 29-30w

Pre-school education
Standard spending assessments 611w

Pre-School Playgroups' Association
22-3w

Prescott, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 586-95, 598-602, 622-7, 638, 640-5, 699, 704-9, 714-7
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 775-81, 783-6, 817, 864-6
Questions
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 562
Network SouthEast, Railway travel 555

Prescription charges
364-5
Pensioners 509w
Pregnant women 509w

Prescription charges exemptions
256w, 508w
Scotland 36w

Prescription drugs
Migraine 152-3w

Prescription Pricing Authority
Finance 148w

Prescriptions
Dietary foods 436-7w
Diethylistilboestrol 507w

Press
Privacy 189w

Press advertising
Dept of Trade & Industry 490w

Press releases
Unemployment 526w

Prestwick Airport
Immigration controls (27:05:93) 1072-8

Price increases
Holidays abroad 112-3w, 160-1w, 285w
Homeowners' insurance 111-2w
House prices 111-2w
Water & sewerage companies 357-8w

Prices
Drugs 336-8w

Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Questions
Artificial insemination, Licensing 256w
Blood, Screening 668w
Cancer, Death 668w
Childbirth 437w
Children, Age distribution 194-6w
Children, Death 436w
Children in care 146-8w
Dept of Health, Civil service manpower 504w
Family health services authorities, Finance 26w
German measles 505w
GP fundholders 255w
Health service staff, Freedom of expression 577w
Health services, Contracts 256w
Junior hospital doctors, Manpower 26-8w
Maternity services, Hospital beds 26w
Medical records, Ownership 329w
Midwives, Manpower 255w
Prescription charges exemptions 256w
Prescription Pricing Authority, Finance 148w
Quarry House, Construction costs 635w
Wellhouse NHS Trust, Manpower 505w

Primary education
Educational finance (18:05:93) 193

Primary health care
Medical research 506w

Prime Minister
Computer privacy 33w
Parliamentary questions 34w

Prince of Wales' Hospital Cardiff
Orthopaedics 714w

Priority routes
Bus services 407w

Prison accommodation
Criminal Justice Bill (HL) 1992/93 422w
Young offenders 426w

Prison education services
Cardiff Prison 207-9w
Thorn Cross Youth Custody Centre 477w

Prison escapes
919

Prison population
724w
Child abuse 720-1w
Young offenders 427-8w

Prison sentences
Drug crimes 719w
Fine defaulters 341w

Prison Service
205-6w
Contracts for services 426w

Prison staff
Criminal records 718-9w
Ethnic minorities 66-7w
Sexual harassment 239w
Wolds Remand Prison 718-9w

Prisoner escorts
Group 4 Securitas 68w, 91-3w
Restraint equipment 94w

Prisoners
Bosnia-Herzegovina 254w
Croatia 574w
Death 566w

Prisoners on remand
727w

Prisoners' transport
Death 205-6w

Prisons
Civil servants' business appointments 565w
Ships 724-5w

Privacy
Press 189w

Privacy & Press Law Review
189w

Private investment
Crossrail 569-70w

Private Members' motions
Sports (17:05:93) 29-70

Private patients
260w

Private sector
Police 210w

Privatisation
British Coal Corporation 692-3w
British Rail 88-9w, 235w, 410-2w, 554, (24:05:93) 584-727, (25:05:93) 758-874
Civil service agencies 683-4w
Coal mining 488w
Courts 14-5
Forestry Commission 336w
London Buses 409-10w
Mechanical metrology laboratory 263-5w
National Weights & Measures Laboratory 690w
Ports 290w
Railway freight transport 235w
Red Star 409w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 97w
Water supply industry 155-6

Probation
60w

Probation & aftercare
Voluntary organisations 339w

Probation hostels
Greater London 566w

Probation supervision grants scheme
Wales 205w

Proceeds of crime
Drug crimes 239-40w

Procurement Executive
Offices 83w

Product safety
EC law 223w

Productivity
Manufacturing industries 283w

Profit sharing
Tax allowances 13w

Prohibition notices
622-3w

Property transfer
Argyll & Clyde Health Board 278w
Lowdham Grange Young Offenders' Institution 67-8w
Milk Marketing Board 25w
Religious buildings 191w
Warren Spring Laboratory 690w

Proportional representation
155

Prosecutions
566
Environmental Protection Act 1990 175w
Extortion 289w
Industrial health & safety 130w
Litter 238w
Pornography 425w

Prostitution
Stamford Hill (18:05:93) 163-6

Protection of Animals (Scotland) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

PSV operators licences
684w

Psychiatric nurses
Nurses' training 36w

Public access
Environmentally sensitive areas 596w

Public appointments
Advisory Committee on NHS Drugs 504w, 576w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board 277w
Black Country Development Corporation 700-1w
British Pharmacopoeia Commission 437-40w
Committee on the Review of Medicines 437-40w
Development Board for Rural Wales 169w
Eastern Health & Social Services Board 160w
Energy Advisory Panel 344w
Fire Advisory Panel 699w
Flood defence committees 362w
Health authorities 670-5w
Judiciary 657w
Non-departmental public bodies 465w, 714-6w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority 490w
Wales 169w, 465w, 714-6w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority 195w

Public buildings
Smoke alarms 502w

Public defenders
361w

Public expenditure
154, 749
Home Office 476w
Royal residences 480-1w

Public footpaths
Fire hazards (26:05:93) 943-8

Public Health Guidance Review Committee
151w

Public inquiries
Road construction 570-1w

Public lavatories
Sleeping rough 193w, 356-7w

Public libraries
Wales 647w

Public petitions
Dogs (17:05:93) 130
Government grants to local authorities (25:05:93) 893
Social security payments (25:05:93) 893

Public sector
Pay settlements 536-7w

Public sector borrowing abroad
667w

Public sector borrowing requirement
420w

Public sector earnings
536-8w

Public sector housing
Smoke alarms 502w

Public sector housing sales
RAF Biggin Hill 231w

Public service pensions
664w

Public telephones
Deaf 33w

Public transport
414-5w
Greater London (27:05:93) 1079-86

Publications
60w, 83w
Church Commissioners 13

Publicity
Environmental Protection Act 1990 175w

Pupil exclusions
606w
Special education 607w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Questions
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 229

Purchase grants
Museums & galleries 479w
National Heritage Memorial Fund 479w

Pyrrolizidine alkaloids
32-3w

Quarry House
Construction costs 635w

Quarrying
Planning permission 269w
Renfrew District Council 269w

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre
Performance standards 98w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Questions
Attorney General, Civil service manpower 380w
Child workers, Conditions of employment 522-3w
Employment level 743-4
Employment opportunities, Cooperatives 132w
Youth unemployment 132-4w

Racial attacks
338-9w, 435w, 473w, (21:05:93) 541-52
Crime prevention 239-40w
Homicide 422w
Law reform 422w
Pendle 718w

Racial conflict
Crime 338-9w, 435w

Racial harassment
(21:05:93) 541-52

Radiation hazards
Industrial health & safety 218w
Radiation protection 262w

Radiation protection
Radiation hazards 262w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 251
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 423-5

Radio Authority
124w
Franchising 124w

Radio broadcasting licences
124w
Ethnic minorities 124w
West Midlands 124w

Radioactive Substances Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102

Radioactive waste disposal
904-5
Magnox reactors 100w
Sellafield 100w, 533w, 595w, 904

Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee
904

Radioactive wastes
176-7w
Nichols Institute Diagnostics 365w

Radon gas
Health hazards 711w
Wales 711w

RAF Biggin Hill
Armed forces housing 231w
Public sector housing sales 231w

Rail Regulator
(24:05:93) 584-727, (25:05:93) 758-874
York 411w

Rail users' consultative committees
(25:05:93) 758-874

Railtrack
88w, 411w, (24:05:93) 584-727, (25:05:93) 758-874

Railway closures
Central line 86w

Railway electrification
Northern region 85w, 89w

Railway fares
87-8w

Railway freight transport
411w
Privatisation 235w
Transport of radioactive materials 332w

Railway maintenance
West Coast railway line 408w

Railway network
Channel tunnel 412w, 569w
East London 332w
Gravesham (18:05:93) 185-8
Greater London 416w
Heathrow Airport 558
Nottinghamshire 2w, 414w

Railway stations
Ashford 410w
Handicapped 270w
Scotland 270w

Railway track
Vandalism 685w

Railway travel
408w
Commuters 553-4
Concessionary fares 562
Greater London 554
Heathrow Airport 558
Liverpool 89w
Network SouthEast 555
South East region 554
West Coast railway line 408w

Railways Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Money res* & Rep (24:05:93) 584-727
Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 758-874
Questions
411w

Rain forests
Belize 21w

Ramsar Convention
553-4w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 247
Questions
Asbestos 652-3w
Business questions 378-9
Digital television 478-9w

Rape
Bosnia-Herzegovina 348w
Young offenders 66w

Rapid reaction corps
141w

Rathbone, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 673, 726-7
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 772-3, 779, 842-4, 867-8
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 929

Raynsford, Mr Nick
Questions
Assured tenancies, Rent increases 701w
Council tax, Valuation 699w
East London river crossing, Oxleas Wood 556-7

Raynsford, Mr Nick—continued
Government buildings, Repairs & maintenance 615w
NHS trusts, Costs 29w
Rent increases 358w
Royal parks, Horticulture 479-80w
Sudan, Overseas aid 567
Unemployment, Greenwich 519w

"Realising our Potential White Paper"
(26:05:93) 923-37

Recess motions
(18:05:93) 161-204

RECHAR
Wales 51w

ReChem International
Incinerators 620w

Recognition of states
Macedonia 515-6w

Recruitment
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation 49-50w

Recycling
356w
Batteries 583w
Glass 706w
Local government services 356w
Wales 706w

Red Star
Privatisation 409w

Redbridge
Local government staff 615w
Magistrates' courts 723w

Redmond, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 261-2
Questions
Bus services, Competition 563
Low flying, South Yorkshire 624w
NHS trusts, Members' constituency work 508w
Open prisons 722-3w
Police authorities, Management 567w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prison staff 718-9w

"Reducing Transport Emissions Through Planning"
155-6w

Redundancy
741
Barnsley 741
British Coal Corporation 692w
Gwent 555w

Redwood, Mr John, Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities
Questions
Association of County Councils 611w
Council tax 609w
Employment protection 914-5
Inner city areas, Government grants 703-4w
Local government finance 611-2w
Local government services, Leicestershire County Council 905
Local government staff, Employment protection 914
Local government staff, Redbridge 615w
Revenue support grant, Cumbria County Council 610-1w
Standard spending assessments, Pre-school education 611w
Storms, Norfolk 60w
Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 615w

Reed beds
Wales 640-2w

Refrigerators
Chlorofluorocarbons 365w

Refugees
Bosnia-Herzegovina 95w
Croatia 163-4w

Refugees—continued
Serbia 251w
Social security recipients 184w
Sri Lanka 721-2w
Travel requirements 435w, 721-2w
Yugoslavia 378w, 435w

Refuse derived fuel
98w, 173w, 579w

Refuse disposal
Lambeth 365-6w

Regional aid
119-20w, 485-6w
EC countries 347-8w
Expenditure 485w

Regional enterprise grants
485-6w
Clwyd 545-6w
Wales 705-6w

Regional health authorities
Disclosure of information 445w
Finance 26w

Regional planning & development
Llanelli Borough Council 311w
Wales 49w

Regional selective assistance
485-6w
Clwyd 546w
Employment opportunities 646-7w
Wales 646-7w, 705-6w

Reid, Dr John
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 306, 308
Questions
TASM 147

Reinsurance (Acts of Terrorism) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1103

Relate
Government grants 196-7w

Religion
Royal Ulster Constabulary 598w

Religious buildings
Property transfer 191w

Religious education
Northern Ireland 291-2w

Relocation of employees
Adjutant-General Corps 145, 346w
Tax allowances 572w

RENAMO
19-20w, 48-9w
Foreign policy 48w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 266-8
Maiden speeches (19:05:93) 266-8
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 818-9

Renfrew
733w
Employment by sector 730w
Listed buildings 214w
Security equipment 214w
Sites of special scientific interest 213w

Renfrew District Council
Housing improvement 212w
Housing revenue accounts 212w
Quarrying 269w

Renfrewshire
Youth training 732-3w

Rent increases
358w
Assured tenancies 701w

Rental deposits
636w

Rented housing
Housing associations 154-5
Rural areas 907-8

Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 412-4

Rents
335w
Business premises (18:05:93) 158-60
Church property 12-3

Rents to mortgages scheme
702w

Reparation by offenders
Scotland 271-2w

Repossession orders
County courts 656w
Mortgage defaulters 310-1w

Representation of the People Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
1R (26:05:93) 942

Republic of Ireland
488-9w
Tourism 291w

Research
Drug abuse 508w, 670w
Higher education 5-6
Wales 5-6

Research finance
Social sciences education 245w

Residential care
Concessionary television licences 123w
Contracts for services 297w
Northern Ireland 292w
Social security payments 687-8w

Resignations
School Examinations & Assessment Council 247-8w

Resistencia Nacional Mocambica
see RENAMO

Restart programme
738-9

Restraint equipment
Prisoner escorts 94w

Retail price index
160w, 280w, 663w
Holidays 161w
Holidays abroad 335-6w

Retail prices
Audio equipment 110w
Video equipment 110w

Retail trade
Northern Ireland 356

Retex
Lancashire Enterprises 228-9

Retirement pensions
Automated credit transfer (18:05:93) 161-3
Gravesham (18:05:93) 185-8
Social security benefits reductions 139w
Social security payments 635w

Returning officers
735w

Revenue support grant
Cumbria County Council 610-1w
Surrey Heath Borough Council 359-60w

Richards, Mr Rod
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 298, 300, 319, 332
Opposition parties, Points of order (26:05:93) 960
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 982-4
Questions
Business start-up scheme, Wales 709w
Cardiff Bay barrage 546w
Company management, Management techniques 639w

Richards, Mr Rod—continued
Council housing management, Council tenants 717-8w
Council tax, Wales 638w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Wales 710w
Exports, Wales 710w
Further education colleges, Wales 9
Higher education, Research 5-6
Historic Buildings Council for Wales, Annual reports 327-8w
Industrial estates, Wales 710w
Local authorities, Billing 326w
Local government services, Contracts for services 716-7w
Managers, Training 547w
New businesses, Training & enterprise councils 551w
Performing arts, Wales 647w
Petroleum exploration, Liverpool Bay 233
Pharmacists, Pay 312-3w
Power stations, Point of Ayr 546w
Public libraries, Wales 647w
Regional enterprise grants, Clwyd 545-6w
Regional selective assistance, Clwyd 546w
Self-employed, Wales 709-10w
Small businesses, Advisory services 549-51w
Small businesses, Wales 134w, 309-10w
SMART awards 451-2w
SMART awards, Clwyd 552w
Support for products under research scheme, Clwyd 640w
Tourist attractions, Wales 52w
Welsh Office, Trade missions 547-8w

Richmond Committee
see Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food

Riddick, Mr Graham
Questions
Council tax 609w
National insurance, Administrative costs 635-6w
Northern Ireland government 352

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Defence
Debates etc.
Representation of the People Bill, 1R (26:05:93) 942

Rights of accused
Police interrogation 292-3w

Rights of audience
Solicitors 17-8

River Clyde
Submarines 86w

River Dee
Bridges 556

River Ebbw
River pollution 638w

River pollution
River Ebbw 638w

River Safety Inquiry
120w

River Thames
87w
Bridges 3-4w

Rivers
Shipping safety 120w

Road accidents
A550 482w
Builth Wells 470w
Cockburnspath bypass 588w
Injuries 568w

Road closures
376-7
Greenford 569w

Road construction
564
A550 481-3w
Birmingham relief road 155w

Road construction—continued
Cost benefit analysis 414w
Developing countries 379w
M3 156w, 570w
Newham 682-3w
North Wales 50w
Public inquiries 570-1w
Road safety 568w
Road traffic 685w
Selby bypass 237w
Urban areas 416w

Road haulage licences
684w

Road safety
Cockburnspath bypass 587-8w
Equipment 555-6
Road construction 568w
Speed limits 409-10w

Road signs
Motorway service areas 684w

Road tolls
415w
Motorways 484w

Road traffic
413-4w
A550 481w, 483w
Builth Wells 469w
Greater London 408-9w
Road construction 685w

Road traffic control
A550 482w
Cameras 556
Equipment 555-6

Road works
A19 570w
A470 470w, 553w
A494 170w
Contracts 553
Expenditure 49w
Wales 49w

Roads
Greater London 555, 569w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Sports (17:05:93) 43, 45
Questions
Baliffs, Leicester 656w
Building regulations, Ventilation 619-20w
Warren Spring Laboratory, Property transfer 690w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn, Minister of State for Wales
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 971-2, 974, 979-80, 990, 994, 996-7, 1010-4
Questions
A470, Road works 470w, 553w
A494, Road works 170w
Banw Primary School, Grant maintained schools 650w
Brecon Beacons National Park 647w
Builth Wells bypass 469w
Business start-up scheme, Wales 709w
Cardiff Airport, Air routes 555w
Day care of children, Government grants 552-3w
Discretionary student grants, Wales 554w
Drug abuse, Schools 169w
Education, Local government expenditure 466-8w
Education, Wales 2-3
Educational assessment, Wales 314w
Educational qualifications, Wales 328w
Educational standards, Wales 8
Free school meals, Wales 706w
Further education colleges, Wales 9
Grant maintained schools, Handicapped pupils 545w
Grant maintained schools, Wales 49w
Handicapped pupils, Teacher training 53w
Hearing aids, Children 170w
Higher education, Research 5-6

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn—continued
Historic Buildings Council for Wales, Annual reports 327-8w
Local government reform, Delyn 50w
Managers, Training 547w
Nature conservation, Planning permission 551-2w
New businesses, Training & enterprise councils 551w
Performing arts, Wales 647w
Public libraries, Wales 647w
Road accidents, Builth Wells 470w
Road construction, North Wales 50w
Road traffic, Builth Wells 469w
Road works, Expenditure 49w
Rural planning, Wales 50-1w
Small businesses, Advisory services 550-1w
Small businesses, Wales 711-2w
SMART awards, Clwyd 552w
Social workers' training, Wales 51-2w
Special education, Curriculum 643-4w
Special protection areas, Wales 553-4w
Special schools, School closures 641-3w
Student grants, Wales 1-2
Student numbers, Wales 2
Teacher training, Higher education colleges 553w
Tourism, Environment protection 135w
Tourist attractions, Wales 52w
Tourists, Wales 645-6w
Training, Wales 9
Training & enterprise councils, Day care of children 469w
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 8-9
University of Wales, Manpower 467-8w
Unruly children, Schools 553w
Young offenders, Discrimination 553w
Youth training, Pregnant women 544w

Robertson, Mr George
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 571-3

Robertson, Mr Raymond S
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 764
Questions
Council tax capping, Scotland 735-6w
Crown Office for Scotland, Building repairs 212-3w
School attendance, Scotland 733w
Sea transport, Scottish Islands 587w
Sea transport, Subsidies 586-7w

Robinson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 257
Questions
EH101 helicopters, Defence procurement 142w

Robinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Making Belfast work programme 294-6w
Making Belfast work programme, Expenditure 296w
Making Belfast work programme, Schools 296w

Roche, Mrs Barbara
Questions
Judiciary, Public appointments 657w
"Testing: The Facts" 333w
Young offenders, Mental health services 436w
Young offenders, Prison accommodation 426w
Young offenders, Prison population 427-8w
Young offenders, Supervision orders 433w

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
Set-aside schemes 687w

ROF Birtley
Ammunition 80w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Foreign Compensation (Amendment) Bill (HL), 3R (18:05:93) 205-6, 208-9
Questions
Ammunition, Defence contracts 116w

Rolling stock
Leaseback arrangements 410w

Rolls-Royce
Defence research 144w

Rolls-Royce Aeroengines
Government assistance 452-3w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 934

Ross, Mr William
Questions
Ballyconnell Canal, Administrative costs 460w
Ballyconnell Canal, EC grants & loans 459-60w
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 355
Northern Ireland Rate Collection Agency, Performance standards 326w
Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland, Performance standards 326w

Rosyth Dockyard
509w
Minesweepers 144w
Nuclear safety (18:05:93) 211-22

Rover Group
Takeovers 580-1w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 782-3
Questions
Allitt, Beverley, Infanticide 669-70w
Former Ministers, Autobiography 566

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, Motion to refer amdt to Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills (17:05:93) 115-20
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 954, 965
Questions
Employment level, Mid Glamorgan 49w
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 9

Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley
Building repairs 279w

Royal Automobile Club
Motorway service areas 89w

Royal family
Electronic surveillance 238w
Official visits 347w

Royal Free Hospital
575w

Royal Free NHS Trust
Hospital patients 575w

Royal High School
Building repairs 212-3w

Royal Irish Regiment
(26:05:93) 942

Royal Military College of Science
629w

Royal Naval Engineering College
513w, 628w

Royal Ordnance
116w, 677w

Royal Palaces Fire Protection Measures Inquiry
600w

Royal parks
Horticulture 479-80w

Royal residences
Fire prevention 600w
Fire regulations 124-5w
Public expenditure 480-1w

Royal Shakespeare Company
Attendance 478w

Royal Ulster Constabulary
598w
Average earnings 599w
Religion 598w

Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast
(17:05:93) 131-8

RU486
Family planning clinics 445w

Ruddock, Ms Joan
Questions
Blakenhurst Prison, Per capita costs 68-9w
Home Office, Children 63w
Prison population 724w
Prison staff, Ethnic minorities 66-7w
Prisons, Ships 724-5w
Women's prisons, Sexual harassment 239w

Rugby
Taxation 13-4w

Rugby Football Union
13-4w

Rugeley
Magistrates' courts 61w

Rural areas
Health services 689w
Housing 907
Rented housing 907-8

Rural planning
Northern Ireland 290w
Wales 50-1w

Rushdie, Salman
122w

Russia
Armed forces strength 454-6w
Nuclear weapons deployment 454w
Overseas aid 375w
Overseas trade 236
Science & technology research 233w

***Sackville, Mr Tom**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
AIDS, Disease control 257-8w
AIDS, Government grants to voluntary organisations 258w
Artificial insemination, Licensing 256w
Blood, Screening 668w
Blood donors 30w, 331w
Breast cancer 442-4w
Breast cancer, Screening 255w
Broadgreen Hospital, Hospital closures 148w
Cancer, Death 668w
Cancer, Medical treatments 437w
Cancer, Non-ionizing radiation 147w
Cancer, Young people 149-50w
Cervical cancer, Screening 193w
Childbirth 437w
Children, Age distribution 194-6w
Children, Death 436w
Comfrey, Health hazards 32-3w
Corporate Affairs Intelligence Unit 258w
Dept of Health, Computer privacy 146w
Dept of Health, Parliamentary questions 30-1w
Dept of Health, Select Committee reports 146w
Dietary foods, Prescriptions 436-7w
Diphtheria, Whitefield School Nelson 29-30w
Electorate, Manchester 509w
Family health services authorities, Finance 26w
Family planning 576w
Fertility, Gloucestershire District Health Authority 444w
Fertility, Medical treatments 578w, 668w
Food packaging, Food contamination 151w
Food poisoning 259w, 676w
Food poisoning, EC countries 676w
Gene Therapy Advisory Committee 440-1w
Genetic engineering 193w
German measles 505w
Hay fever, Air pollution 28-9w
Health authorities, Administrative costs 260w

***Sackville, Mr Tom**—continued*
Health education, Magazine press 330w
Health hazards, Condensation 578w
Heart diseases, Expenditure 503-4w
HIV infection, Elderly 675w
HIV infection, Health education 27w
Hospices, Finance 675w
Hospital patients, Hospital admissions 151-2w
Hospital patients, Hospital discharges 152w
Hospital waiting lists, Northern Regional Health Authority 578w
Hospitals 577w
Hospitals, Patients' transport 670w
Hospitals, Security 577-8w
Human Fertilisation & Embryology Act 1990 192w
Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority, Finance 192w
Maternal mortality 28w
Maternity services, Hospital beds 26w
Medical equipment, Charitable donations 675w
Medical malpractice, Costs 147w
Medical records, Computer privacy 194w
Medical records, Ownership 329w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Hospital patients 196w
Midwives, Manpower 255w
Multiple births 444-5w
Negligence, Handicapped children 194w
NHS complaints 670w
NHS internal market 440w
NHS Management Executive 151w
NHS trusts, Costs 29w
NHS trusts, Directors 191w
No-fault compensation, Handicapped children 195w
Nursery nurses, Nursery Schools 508-9w
Nurses, Career structure 145w
Patient's Charter 254-5w
Private patients 260w
Regional health authorities, Disclosure of information 445w
Royal Free NHS Trust, Hospital patients 575w
RU486, Family planning clinics 445w
Salmonella 577w
Suicide 442w
Terminal care, Income support 445-6w
Tuberculosis, Vaccination 31-2w
Whooping cough, Vaccination 191-2w

Safer cities scheme
206w, 421-2w
Finance 206-7w

***Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim**, Minister for Industry*
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 334-7
Questions
Aerospace industry, Exports 117-8w
Aerospace industry, Government assistance 117w, 453w
Aerospace industry, Manpower 117w
Airports, Liverpool 225w
Ammunition, Defence contracts 116w
Assisted areas 35-6w, 452w, 691w
Assisted areas, Cumbria 239
Assisted areas, London boroughs 287w
Balance of trade 232
Car industry, Foreign investment in UK 231-2
Cars, Exports 231-2
Commodity prices 235
Dept of Trade & Industry, Press advertising 490w
EC grants & loans, EC countries 580w
Ford Motor Company, Exports 232
Foreign investment in UK, Advertising 121w
GATT, Clothing industry 229-30
Industrial policy 235
Inflation 235
Kvaerner Govan, Government grants 582w
Kvaerner Govan, Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w
Manufacturing industries 238-9
Packaging, Germany 118w
Regional aid 119-20w, 485-6w
Regional aid, Expenditure 485w

***Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim**—continued*
Rolls-Royce Aeroengines, Government assistance 452-3w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 288-9w
Small businesses, Standards specifications 285w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w
Textile industry, Clothing industry 221w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 228-30
Voting behaviour, EC Industry Council 452w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 257
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 877
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 829-30, 833, 835-6
Questions
Business questions 374
Chlorofluorocarbons, EC law 366-7w
Council tax exemptions, Mentally disadvantaged 532-3w, 555-6w
Dry cleaning, Chlorofluorocarbons 287-8w
Income support, Social security benefits disqualification 140w
Income support, Social security payments 306-8w
Rosyth Dockyard, Minesweepers 144w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 904
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 636-7w
Unemployment 131w
Unemployment benefits 128w

Salmonella
577w

Sanctions
China 43w
Croatia 45w, 163w
Montenegro 373w
Serbia 44-5w, 349w, 373w
Yugoslavia 372w, 516w

Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association
286w

Saudi Arabia
116w

Saughton Prison
269-70w

Schizophrenia
442w

School attendance
Scotland 733w

School closures
Special schools 601-6w, 641-3w

School Curriculum & Assessment Authority
247-8w

School Examinations & Assessment Council
Resignations 247-8w

School nurses
Manpower 331w

School population
Special education 22w

Schools
661w
Drug abuse 169w
Inspections 168w, 607w
Intimidation 106w
Making Belfast work programme 296w
Unruly children 553w

Science & Engineering Research Council
(26:05:93) 923-37

Science & technology policy
Ministerial statements (26:05:93) 923-37
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 596-7w

Science & technology research
Russia 233w
Technical assistance 233w

Science education
Educational assessment 383w
Trans European mobility scheme for university students 106w

Scotland
14w, 36-8w, 128w, 133w, 369-72, 374, 496-8w, 589w
Access to buildings 734w
Acute beds 36w
Army 149-50
Assisted places scheme 272w
Bus stations 215w
Carpet industry 212w
Civil service agencies 584-6w
Community care 273-4w, 732w
Council tax 215w
Council tax capping 735-6w
Credit unions 738w
Defence contracts 248w
Dental charges exemptions 36w
Domestic energy conservation 585w
Drama 15-7w
Economic growth 733w
Election expenses 735w
Employment opportunities 33-4w
Employment schemes 350-2w
Environment protection 216w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 273w
Family doctors 496-7w
Family practitioner services 270-1w
Fire Services Benevolent Fund 727-8w
Food industry 728w
Forensic science 734w
Forestry 733w
Further education colleges 279-80w
GP fundholders 350w
Handicapped 734w
Health service staff 37w
Hedges & ditches 352w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 734w
Horticulture 728w
Hospices 270w
Hospital consultants 38w
Hospital doctors 273w
In vitro fertilisation 727w
Infant mortality 274-8w
Inland Revenue 15w
Maternity services 215w
Medical appeal tribunals 459w
Multiple births 498-500w
NHS trusts 37w
Non-fossil fuel obligation 351w
Nurses 498w
Nurses' training 36-7w
Opencast mining 351w
Party conferences 733-4w
Planning appeals 352w
Plants 585-6w
Play groups 37w
Playgrounds 213-4w
Police 584w
Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry 588w
Prescription charges exemptions 36w
Railway stations 270w
Reparation by offenders 271-2w
School attendance 733w
Seals 689w
Sexual offences 448-9w, 585w, 731w
Slaughterhouses 586w
Social security appeals 459w
Speech impaired 133w, 731w
Student grants 272w
Sub post offices 37w
Textile industry 728-9w
Training 746-7
Unemployed 497w
Water supply industry 155-6, 366
Witnesses 449w

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas, Minister for Social Security and Disabled People
Questions
Attendance allowance, Social security claims 298-306w
Blind, Expenditure 557-8w
Disability appeal tribunals, Disability living allowance 563w
Disability living allowance 564w, 629-30w

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas—continued
Disability living allowance, Alzheimer's disease 77w
Disability living allowance, Concessionary fares 458-9w
Disability living allowance, Mentally disadvantaged 77w
Disability living allowance, Social security benefits rules 77w
Disability living allowance, Social security claims 561w
Disability working allowance, Social security claims 305w
Handicap benefits, Administrative delays 563-4w
Handicapped, Social security benefits 556w
Hospital visitor benefits, Child patients 635w
Independent Living 1993 Fund 138w
Industrial injuries scheme, Self-employed 188w
Invalidity benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 75w
Invalidity benefits, Social security benefits rules 76-7w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis, Social security benefits 556w
"Paying for Independence" 561w
Rental deposits 636w
Social Fund, Child patients 138w
Social security recipients, Self-employed 183w

Scott Inquiry
see Arms to Iraq Inquiry

Scottish Aggregates
269w

Scottish Ambulance Service
277-8w

Scottish Association for Care & Resettlement of Offenders
271-2w

Scottish Bus Group
215w

Scottish Conservative Party
733-4w

Scottish councils
Contracts for services 588w

Scottish courts
731-2w
Acquittals 499-500w
Convictions 499-500w

Scottish Grand Committee
(17:05:93) 28

Scottish health boards
Contracts for services 449w
Drug abuse 274w
HIV infection 274w
Parliamentary questions 660-1w

Scottish Homes
279w
Housing improvement 212w

Scottish Islands
Sea transport 586-7w

Scottish Labour Party
733-4w

Scottish Office
Computer privacy 270w
Management consultants 738w
Select Committee reports 588w

Scottish Office Agriculture & Fisheries Dept
Manpower 497-8w

Scottish Office Education Dept
Government grants 211-2w

Scottish Prison Service
Contracts for services 730w

Scottish Transport Group
215w

Screening
Blood 668w
Breast cancer 255w
Cervical cancer 193w, 449-50w, 735w

Sea navigation
Tanker ships 85-6w

Sea pollution
Sellafield 533w

Sea rescue
Devon 237w

Sea transport
Defence equipment 510w
Scottish Islands 586-7w
Subsidies 586-7w
Transport of radioactive materials 89w, 683w

Seals
Nature conservation 689w
Scotland 689w

Secure accommodation
477w
Voluntary schools 193-4w

Securities & Investments Board
539-41w
Self-regulating organisations 665w

Security
Hospitals 577-8w
Party conferences 733-4w

Security equipment
Renfrew 214w

Security Service
see MI5

Segregation of prisoners
721w

Seismic monitoring
363w

Seized Assets Fund
197-203w

Selby bypass
Road construction 237w

Select Committee reports
484w
Attorney General 681-2w
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 568w
Dept for Education 22w
Dept of Employment 248-50w
Dept of Health 146w
Dept of Trade & Industry 690-1w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 349w, 515w
Home Office 473-4w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 361-2w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 595-6w
Northern Ireland Office 158w
Scottish Office 588w
Treasury 417w
Welsh Office 713w

Self-employed
464w
Industrial injuries scheme 188w
National insurance contributions 183-4w
Social security benefits rules 137w
Social security recipients 183w
Wales 13w, 183-4w, 310w, 709-10w

Self-employed pensions
Tax allowances 13w

Self-regulating organisations
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation 539-41w
Securities & Investments Board 665w

Self-regulatory system
Financial markets 333-4w

Sellafield
332w, 610w
Plutonium 225-6w

Sellafield—*continued*
Radioactive waste disposal 100w, 533w, 595w, 904
Sea pollution 533w
THORP 486w

Sentencing
Sexual offences 585w

Serbia
162w, 251w, 373w
Refugees 251w
Sanctions 44-5w, 349w, 373w

Serious Fraud Office
Polly Peck 85w

Set-aside schemes
685-7w
Land use 243w
Wales 713w

Severe disability premium
Social security benefits rules 560w

Severe hardship provision
Durham County 694-7w

Sewage
Waste disposal 614w

Sex discrimination
Pay 654w
Social security benefits 73-6w
Women's employment 654-5w

Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Questions
533-4w

Sexual harassment
655w
Prison staff 239w
Women's prisons 239w

Sexual offences
Scotland 448-9w, 585w, 731w
Sentencing 585w
Trials 448-9w

Shared ownership schemes
617w

Shareholders
Company disclosure of information 224w

Shares
Charities 107w

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 397
Questions
Business questions 376
Government departments, Administrative costs 664-5w
Hospitals 577w
Public service pensions 664w
Restart programme 738-9

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 887
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 928
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 575
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 920

Sheehy Committee
see Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry

Sheep
Ear tagging 718w
Wales 718w

Sheep premiums
595w, 687w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Questions
Arms trade, Kuwait 140-1
Bombings, City of London 722w
Construction materials, Standards specifications 700w

Sheerman, Mr Barry—*continued
Glass, Standards specifications 700w
Sunday trading 724w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Questions
Tax rates & bands 751

Shell
(19:05:93) 342-50

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian, Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Employment level 743-4
Employment level, EC countries 743
Employment schemes 519w
Industrial disputes, Employment protection 738
Jobplan workshops 520w
Restart programme 738-9
Take-up of employment 738
Training, Young people 735
Training for work 519w
Youth training 735-6, 743
Youth unemployment 741-2
Youth unemployment, Hampshire 742
Youth unemployment, Wallasey 742-3

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Poultry meat (27:05:93) 1087-91, 1093
Questions
Community action, West Midlands 745-6

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 392
Questions
Black Country Development Corporation, Public appointments 700-1w
Parliamentary questions, District health authorities 660-1w

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 259
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 933
Questions
Food packaging, Food contamination 151w
Hillingdon Hospital, Industrial health & safety 259-61w
London Buses, Privatisation 409w
Police, Computer applications 724w

Shetland
85-6w, 586-7w

Shipbuilding
Defence procurement 142w
Nuclear submarines 509w

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund
288-9w
Kvaerner Govan 583w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders 583w

Shipping
Spain 332w

Shipping safety
Rivers 120w

Ships
Prisons 724-5w

Shopping centres
Northern Ireland 355-6

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 401, 411, 415-7, 458
Questions
Crossrail, Private investment 569-70w
Income support, Tower Hamlets 136w

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 73, 80, 82-8, 89-90
Questions

Short, Ms Clare—*continued
Employment schemes 217-8w
Employment schemes, Industrial accidents 315-22w
Employment schemes, Scotland 350-2w
Enterprise training 524-5w
Methane, Tipping of waste 359w
Ozone layer, Health hazards 920-2
UN Convention on Biological Diversity 155w, 180w

Silverhill colliery
692-3w

Simpson, Mr Alan
Questions
Business questions 378

Sims, Mr Roger
Questions
Child abuse, Death 337-8w
Child abuse, Parent & child 255-6w
Children, Homicide 238w
Railway travel, Greater London 554

Sites of special scientific interest
Paisley 213w
Renfrew 213w

Sittings of the House Select Committee
377-8

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy (26:05:93) 930

Skin disorders
Medical treatments 444w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 383, 403
Standing Order No 20 applications, Points of order (24:05:93) 582
Whales (17:05:93) 20, 26-7
Questions
Business questions 376
Employment level 743
Housing construction, Council housing 615w
Solicitors, Rights of audience 18

Skye bridge
Construction 38w, 273-4w

Slaughterhouses
593-4w
EC action (24:05:93) 728
Northern Ireland 689w
Scotland 586w
Wales 311-2w, 648w, 713w

Sleeping rough
Outer London boroughs 701w
Public lavatories 193w, 356-7w

Small businesses
Advisory services 549-51w
Banks 224w
Clwyd 549-51w
Corporation tax 283w
Defence contracts 148
Employment opportunities 238-9
Ethnic minorities 610w
Inner city areas 610w
Loans 453w
Standards specifications 285w
Training & enterprise councils 288w
Wales 134w, 309-10w, 711-2w

SMART awards
451-2w, 581-2w
Clwyd 552w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Environment Agency, Points of order (26:05:93) 939
Questions
"Digest of Environmental Protection & Water Statistics" 533w
Ecolabelling 909-10
Environment protection, Orders & regulations 619w

Smith, Mr Chris—continued
Environmental policy 531-2w
Environmental policy, Government departments 501-2w
Forestry Commission 736-7w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 584w
Forestry Commission, Land ownership & tenure 351w
Forestry Commission, Privatisation 336w
Forests, Access to countryside 584w, 736w
Glaxo, Warren Spring Laboratory 342w
Hay fever, Air pollution 28-9w
Heart diseases, Expenditure 503-4w
HIV infection, Health education 27w
Water supply, Lead pollution 176w

Smith, Rt Hon John
Questions
Allitt, Beverley, Inquiries 152-3
Prescription charges 364-5

Smith, Mr Llew
Questions
Air pollution, EC action 178w
Banks, Licensing 334w
British dependent territories, Overseas aid 103w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution 286w
Carbon tax, EC action 487-8w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Air conditioning 527w
Climate, Conferences 356w
Consar, Defence contracts 230w
Cruise missiles, Ukraine 262w
Defence contracts, Departmental records 678w
Defence equipment, Sea transport 510w
EC Development Council, Development aid 18w
EC Environment Council 175w
Economic policy, Environment protection 666w
Electricity generation, Departmental publications 34w
"Energy Use & Energy Efficiency in UK Manufacturing Industry up to the Year 2000" 529w
Environment protection, Children 366w
Environment protection, Civil liability 225w
Environment protection, EC law 179w
Environment protection, India 357w
Environment protection, International cooperation 179w
Environment protection, Scotland 216w
Environment protection, Tourism 135w
Environmental impact assessment, EC law 354-5w
Environmental impact assessment, Offices 526-7w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Disclosure of information 273w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Prosecutions 175w
Environmental Protection Act 1990, Publicity 175w
European Armaments Agency 678w
European Nuclear Safeguards Research Development Association, International conferences 286w
Export controls, Codes of practice 342w
Free school meals, Wales 706w
Geographical information systems 543w
Geographical information systems, Computers in government departments 617w
Global environmental facility 589w
Government laboratories, Environmental research 690w
HM Inspectorate of Pollution 354w
Home energy efficiency scheme 175-6w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 7
Housing construction, Planning permission 58w
"Human Development Report, 1993" 589w
Industrial health & safety, Radiation hazards 218w
International Military Services, Government shareholding 418w, 677w
Local government reform, Wales 135w
Luchaire Defence, Defence contracts 678w
National Consumer Council, International trade 227w

Smith, Mr Llew—continued
National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Environment protection 365w
Nervous system disorders, Medical research 311w
Nichols Institute Diagnostics, Radioactive wastes 365w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, UK delegations 678-9w
Nuclear reactors, Decommissioning 661w
Nuclear safeguards, EC law 348w
Nuclear safety 486-7w
Nuclear safety, EC action 341w
Nuclear weapons, Transport of radioactive materials 81w
Plutonium, Japan 487w
Radioactive wastes 176w
ReChem International, Incinerators 620w
Recycling, Local government services 356w
"Reducing Transport Emissions Through Planning" 155-6w
River Ebbw, River pollution 638w
Royal family, Electronic surveillance 238w
Sanitary Medical Disposal Services Association 286w
Science & technology research, Technical assistance 233w
Sellafield, Radioactive waste disposal 595w
SPEL, Defence contracts 230w
Sunday Times, Departmental correspondence 663w
Trans European mobility scheme for university students, Science education 106w
Transport of radioactive materials, Plutonium 156w, 683w
Transport of radioactive materials, Sea transport 89w, 683w
Trawsfynydd power station, Plutonium 638w
UN Conference on Human Settlements 178-9w
Warren Spring Laboratory, Telephone services 342w
Waste management, Licensing 173-4w
Water pollution, EC law 354w
Water pollution, Germany 179w

Smith, Mr Tim
Questions
Grant maintained schools, Accounting 246w
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, Self-regulating organisations 539-41w

Smoke alarms
Public buildings 502w
Public sector housing 502w
Social security recipients 187w

Smuggling
Animals 418w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1037, 1041
Questions
Building regulations, Northern Ireland 461-2w
Fire prevention, Northern Ireland 460-1w
Fire regulations, Northern Ireland 462-3w
Residential care, Northern Ireland 292w
Retail trade, Northern Ireland 356
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 363
Terrorism, Compensation 325-6w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 500w
UN Operation in Somalia 142w

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 645-6, 659-61, 678, 693-5
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 767-9, 786-91
Questions
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 562

Snaresbrook
Magistrates' courts 723w

Soames, Mr Nicholas, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture
Debates etc.
Poultry meat (27:05:93) 1090-4
Questions
Animal diseases, Notifiable diseases 593w
Animal welfare, EC law 542w
Birds, Import of live animals 172w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 687w
Dietary supplements 114-5w
Export of live animals, EC internal trade 24w
Food labelling, Genetically modified organisms 24w
Pesticides 595w
Slaughterhouses 593-4w

Social Fund
Child patients 138w

Social sciences education
Research finance 245w

Social security abuse
188-9w, 289w
Identity cards 693w

Social security appeals
Scotland 459w

Social security benefits
Administrative delays 324-5w, 458w
Compensation 458w
Handicapped 556w
Myalgic encephalomyelitis 500-1w, 556w
Per capita costs 457w
Performance standards 632-4w
Sex discrimination 73-6w

Social Security Benefits Agency
Contracts for services 296-7w
Parliamentary questions 72-3w
Pay 184-5w

Social security benefits disqualification
Income support 140w
Invalidity benefits 75w

Social security benefits rates
Christmas bonus 323w

Social security benefits reductions
Retirement pensions 139w

Social security benefits rules
Disability living allowance 77w
Invalidity benefits 76-7w
Self-employed 137w
Severe disability premium 560w

Social security claims
632-4w
Attendance allowance 298-306w
Disability living allowance 298-306w, 561w
Disability working allowance 305w

Social Security Contributions & Benefits Act 1992
Questions
458-9w

Social security payments
557w
Automated credit transfer 137w, 185-7w, 297w, 455-7w, 557w, 636-7w
Income support 306-8w
Northern Ireland 687-8w
Opposition days (19:05:93) 245-96
Pensions 185-7w
Post offices 137w, 153-4, 228w, 631w, (25:05:93) 893
Public petitions (25:05:93) 893
Residential care 687-8w
Retirement pensions 635w
Sub post offices 37w
Theft 186w

Social security recipients
556w
Immigrants 184w
Industrial injuries scheme 56w
Invalidity benefits 56-7w
Refugees 184w
Self-employed 183w

Social security recipients—continued
Smoke alarms 187w
State earnings related pension scheme 323-4w

Social workers' training
Wales 51-2w

Soley, Mr Clive
Questions
Clinical laboratories, Technicians 195w, 579w
Dyslexia, Unruly children 401w
Empty property, Government buildings 912-3
RAF Biggin Hill, Armed forces housing 231w
Road traffic, Greater London 408-9w

Solicitor-General for Scotland
729-30w

Solicitors
Rights of audience 17-8

South Africa
Democracy 568
Higher education 481w
Overseas aid 481w, 568-9

South America
Beef 363w

South Birmingham Health Authority
Health service staff 670w

South East region
Railway travel 554
Training 737
Transport 409w

South Korea
Textiles 693w

South Manchester Community College
477w

South West region
Armed forces civilians 525-6w

South Yorkshire
Low flying 624w

Southern Africa
Development aid 20w

Spain
Shipping 332w

Spastics' Society
329w

Speaker and deputies, For rulings & statements see separate heading Speaker's rulings & statements
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (19:05:93) 245, 297, (20:05:93) 381, (24:05:93) 585, 637, 650, 685, 703, (25:05:93) 772, 774, 775, 813, 842, 844, 849, 855, 858-9
Business questions (20:05:93) 373, 377, 378, 379
Calling of Members (24:05:93) 723, (25:05:93) 748, (27:05:93) 1034
Calls to order (17:05:93) 4, 28, 115, 125, 128, (18:05:93) 153, 202, (19:05:93) 254, 311, (24:05:93) 580, 674, 686, (25:05:93) 749, 835, 868, (26:05:93) 936
Disallowed questions (17:05:93) 5, (26:05:93) 919
EC documents motions (24:05:93) 727
Fisheries, Points of order (25:05:93) 874
Leave to speak (19:05:93) 344, (27:05:93) 1083
Members' interventions (18:05:93) 172, (19:05:93) 255, 257, 261, 278, 302, (20:05:93) 391, 407, (25:05:93) 771, 787, 796, (26:05:93) 983-4
Members' speeches (17:05:93) 61, (19:05:93) 245, 318, (20:05:93) 445, (26:05:93) 927, 979
Orders & regulations motions (17:05:93) 28, 130, (24:05:93) 583, 728
Points of order (18:05:93) 157, (19:05:93) 255, (20:05:93) 380, (21:05:93) 480, 509, (24:05:93) 582, (25:05:93) 753-4, 774, 813, (26:05:93) 937-42, 948, 960, (27:05:93) 1023, 1034, 1053

Speaker and deputies—continued
Royal Assent (27:05:93) 1102
Scope of debate (20:05:93) 397, 460, (24:05:93) 608, 613, 664, (25:05:93) 789, 792, 835, (26:05:93) 984
Standing Order No 20 applications, Bombings (24:05:93) 582
Supplementary questions (17:05:93) 4-5, 13, 18, (18:05:93) 145, 151, (19:05:93) 228, 236, (26:05:93) 910
Ten minutes rule (20:05:93) 417
White papers, Points of order (26:05:93) 941

Speaker's rulings & statements
House of Commons debates (20:05:93) 379
Members' speeches (26:05:93) 968, 985
Parliamentary privilege (24:05:93) 583
Ten minutes rule (20:05:93) 381

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 72
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 397, 454-5
Public transport, Greater London (27:05:93) 1081-2, 1084
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 706, 712
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 781
Questions
Beef, West Africa 172w
Road construction, Newham 682-3w
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 187w
Transport, Planning permission 237w

Special education
105-6w
Curriculum 608w, 643-4w
Hearing aids 167-8w
Pupil exclusions 607w
School population 22w
Wales 643-4w

Special protection areas
Wales 553-4w

Special schools
607-8w
School closures 601-6w, 641-3w
Wales 641-3w

Speech impaired
Scotland 133w, 731w

Speed, Sir Keith
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 671-2
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 758-60, 771-2, 774, 798-9

Speed limits
Road safety 409-10w

SPEL
Defence contracts 230w

Spellar, Mr John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 795
Questions
Blood donors 30w
British Nuclear Fuels, Company finance 226w
Chemists shops, West Midlands 261w
Concessionary fares, Pensioners 561
Council tax, Surrey Heath Borough Council 359-60w
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Manpower 237-8
Peat 596w
Profit sharing, Tax allowances 13w

Spencer, Sir Derek, Solicitor-General
Questions
Contempt of court 566
Crown Prosecution Service, Equal opportunities 567
Prosecutions 566
Serious Fraud Office, Polly Peck 85w

Spicer, Sir Jim
Questions
Housing Corporation, Housing construction 181-2w

Spicer, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 450-2

Spink, Dr Robert
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (18:05:93) 186, (19:05:93) 257
Calling of Members, Points of order (26:05:93) 937
Primary education, Educational finance (18:05:93) 193
Questions
Council housing, Empty housing 913
Council tax, Discounts 527-8w
Personal tax allowances, Widows 533-4w
Poetry, Curriculum 495w
Schools, Inspections 168w

Sports
Private Members' motions (17:05:93) 29-70

Sports centres
Johnstone 735w
Urban programme 735w

Sports competitors
Tax yields 283-4w

Sports Council
(17:05:93) 29-70

Sports Council for England
(17:05:93) 29-70

Spring, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 314
Questions
Objects in lieu of tax 480w

Squire, Mr Robin, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of the Environment
Questions
Arts festivals, Liverpool 177-8w
Black Country Development Corporation, Public appointments 700-1w
Bromley Borough Council, Fraud 179-80w
Centre for Urban Policy Studies, Deprivation indicators 58-9w
City challenge, Liverpool 59w
Coal, Local government expenditure 702w
Community charge, Non-payment 360w
Community development, Liverpool 182w
Council tax 699-700w, 910-1
Council tax, Appeals 699w
Council tax, Discounts 527-8w
Council tax, Lambeth Borough Council 910
Council tax, Surrey Heath Borough Council 359-60w
Council tax, Transitional arrangements 367w, 910
Council tax, Valuation 114w, 699w
Council tax capping, Gloucestershire 613-4w
Council tax exemptions, Mentally disadvantaged 532-3w
County councils, Local government finance 367-8w
Enterprise zones, Easington 617-8w
Enterprise zones, Employment opportunities 529w
Enterprise zones, Mansfield 702w
Government grants to local authorities 705w, 915-6
Government grants to local authorities, Local government expenditure 616-7w
Government grants to local authorities, Wandsworth 915
Inner city areas, Small businesses 610w
Local Government Commission for England 532w
Local government finance 613w
Local government reform 358w, 532w, 615w
Local government revenue, Council house sales 612-3w
Local government services, Competition 355w
Local government services, Contracts for services 364w, 609w

Squire, Mr Robin—continued
Local government staff 358w
Merseyside Development Corporation, Finance 614w
Merseyside Integrated Development Operation 620w
Plymouth Development Corporation 614w
Refuse disposal, Lambeth 365-6w
St George's Hall Liverpool, Government grants 59w
Standard spending assessments 180-1w, 611w
Urban programme 701w
Urban programme, Manchester 618w

Sri Lanka
Refugees 721-2w

St Ethelburgas' Church
Bombings 12

St George's Hall Liverpool
Government grants 59w

St Helena
Official visits 516w
Overseas aid 589-90w

St John's Hospital Chelmsford
196w

Staffordshire
Local government reform (18:05:93) 166-9
Police authorities 93w

Stamford Hill
Prostitution (18:05:93) 163-6

Standard assessment tasks
167w

Standard spending assessments
180-1w, 611w
Pre-school education 611w

Standards specifications
Construction materials 700w
Glass 700w, 722w
Small businesses 285w

Standing Order No 20 applications
Bombings (24:05:93) 581

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 656-9
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 813, 816-8, 822-3

Stansted Airport
685w

State earnings related pension scheme
Social security recipients 323-4w

State visits
Croatia 42w

Statistics
Unemployment 519w

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Debates etc.
Arms to Iraq Inquiry, Points of order (25:05:93) 754
Export promotion (21:05:93) 485, 499-503, 506, 535, 538
Questions
Bickley, Raymond, Legal representation 166w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 573-4
Community care 366-7
Contraceptives, Limited list prescribing 255w
Convictions, Confessions 722w
Diplomatic service, Human rights 166w
Edinburgh University Dental School, Departmental correspondence 214w
Non-fossil fuel obligation, Scotland 351w
Westminster Foundation for Democracy 568

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Coastal protection, Devon 25-6w
Defence review, Empty property 510w
Diving Disease Research Centre, Taxation 111w

Steen, Mr Anthony—continued
Mortgage relief, Members' correspondence 106w
Severe disability premium, Social security benefits rules 560w
Sheep premiums 687w

Steetley Magnesia Products
228

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Computers in schools 105w
Educational assessment 491-2w
Prisoner escorts, Restraint equipment 94w
Schools, Inspections 607w
Schools, Intimidation 106w
Special education 105-6w
Special education, School population 22w

Stephen, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
A27, Worthing (20:05:93) 473-4
Defence industries (19:05:93) 310-1
Export promotion (21:05:93) 491, 493, 495, 511, 515-6, 524-32, 536
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 646-7
Questions
Court Service, Civil service agencies 657-8w
Extradition, Cyprus 565
Gas pipelines, Europe 489w

Sterling
Exchange rates 421w

Stern, Mr Michael
Questions
Landlord & tenant, Law reform 698w

Stewart, Mr Allan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Debates etc.
Stobhill Hospital (27:05:93) 1049-52
Questions
Acute beds, Scotland 36w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Ambulance services 277-8w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Property transfer 278w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board, Public appointments 277w
Carpet industry, Scotland 212w
Cervical cancer, Screening 735w
Community care, Finance 273-4w
Community care, Scotland 732w
Council tax, Scotland 215w
Domestic energy conservation, Scotland 585w
East Fortune Hospital, Geriatric patients 38w
Economic growth, Strathclyde 733w
Employment by sector, Renfrew 730w
Employment schemes, Scotland 350-2w
Family doctors, Surgery 496-7w
Family practitioner services, Scotland 270-1w
Food industry, Strathclyde 728w
GP fundholders, Scotland 350w
Handicapped, Advisory bodies 734w
Health service staff, Scotland 37w
HIV infection, Scottish health boards 274w
Horticulture, Occupational therapy 728w
Hospices, Children 270w
Hospital consultants, Gynaecology 38w
Hospital doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 273w
Housing construction, Dundee 39w
In vitro fertilisation, Scotland 727w
Infant mortality, Scotland 274-8w
Inner city areas, Glasgow 271w
Maternity services, Scotland 215w
Multiple births, Scotland 498-500w
NHS trusts, Managers 37w
Nurses, Career structure 498w
Nurses' training, Psychiatric nurses 36w
Nurses' training, Scotland 36-7w
Opencast mining, Planning appeals 351w
Planning appeals, Legal costs 352w
Play groups, Government grants 37w
Prescription charges exemptions, Scotland 36w
Quarrying, Planning permission 269w
Royal Alexandra Hospital Paisley, Building repairs 279w

Stewart, Mr Allan—continued
Scottish councils, Contracts for services 588w
Scottish health boards, Contracts for services 449w
Sub post offices, Social security payments 37w
Textile industry, Strathclyde 728-9w
Toxic shock syndrome 732w
Unemployed, Scotland 497w
Youth training, Renfrewshire 732-3w

Stobhill Hospital
(27:05:93) 1045-53

Stockport Health Authority
Pink, Graham 441w

Stockton on Tees County Court
14

Storms
Norfolk 60w

Stott, Mr Roger
Questions
Energy prices, Northern Ireland 355

Strang, Dr Gavin
Debates etc.
Whales (17:05:93) 21-2
Questions
Integrated administration & control system 172-3w
Medicines Commission, Bovine somatotropin 114w

Strategic defence initiative
147

Stratford-on-Avon
Tourists 478w

Strathclyde
459w
Economic growth 733w
Food industry 728w
Textile industry 728-9w
Water charges 269w

Strathclyde Regional Council
Water charges 211w

Straw, Mr Jack
Questions
Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England & Wales 618w
Council tax 911
Empty housing, Council housing 913

Strawberries
France 243w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 300
Rosyth Dockyard, Nuclear safety (18:05:93) 212, 214, 217
Questions
Business questions 373-4
Ford Motor Company, Exports 232
Local government finance 613w
Local government revenue, Council house sales 612-3w
Plymouth Development Corporation 614w
Royal Naval Engineering College 513w

Student grants
491w
Legal profession 403w, 656-7w
Scotland 272w
Wales 1-2

Student loans
23w, 105w, 492w

Student numbers
247w
University of Wales 467-8w
Wales 2

Sub post offices
Scotland 37w
Social security payments 37w

Submarines
625w
Defence review 142
River Clyde 86w

SubSaharan Africa
Economic situation 19w, 379w

Subsidiarity
EC law 750-1

Sudan
Overseas aid 567

Suicide
442w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 272
Defence industries (19:05:93) 297
Questions
Christmas bonus, Social security benefits rates 323w
Junior hospital doctors, Working hours 257w

Sunday Times
Departmental correspondence 663w

Sunday trading
(18:05:93) 181-5, 724w
Northern Ireland 363

Supervision orders
Young offenders 433w

Support for products under research scheme
581-2w
Clwyd 640w

Surgery
Family doctors 496-7w

Surrey Heath Borough Council
Council tax 359-60w
Revenue support grant 359-60w

Suspended sentences
425w

Sussex
Planning permission 58w

Sustainable development
234w
Civil service manpower 283w
Wales 51w

Swan Hunter Shipbuilders
149, (19:05:93) 297-341, 626-7w
Defence procurement 145w
Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w

Sweeney, Mr Walter
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 993-4
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Falkland Islands 150
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 7

SYSMIN
377w

Takeovers
Dan Air 580w
Rover Group 580-1w

Take-up of employment
738
Older workers 622w

Tanker ships
Sea navigation 85-6w

Tanzania
Import of live animals 172w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 405, 407
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 577

Tapsell, Sir Peter—continued
Official engagements 122w, 502w
Treaty on European Union 364

TASM
143, 147, 261w, 454w

Tax allowances
Northern Ireland 664w
Petroleum exploration 537-8w
Profit sharing 13w
Relocation of employees 572w
Self-employed pensions 13w
Vocational training 281w

Tax assessment
107-9w

Tax burden
Family income 284-5w

Tax evasion
Television licences 66w

Tax harmonisation
Company taxation (24:05:93) 727-8

Tax rates & bands
751
Income tax 418w

Tax reform
Petroleum revenue tax 419w

Tax yields
Car tax 418-9w
Entertainers 283-4w
Income tax 664-5w
Petroleum revenue tax 15w
Sports competitors 283-4w
Tobacco duties 283w

Taxation
British residents abroad 14-5w
Diving Disease Research Centre 111w
Members' visits abroad 571w
Overseas workers 572w
Rugby 13-4w

Taxis
Greater London 2-3w
Licensing 2-3w

Taxpayers
Income tax 573-4w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Questions
Handicapped pupils, Educational assessment 494-5w
Higher education, Citizen's Charter 652w
Teacher training 492-3w, 652w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 400
Questions
Bus services, Competition 562-3

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc.
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1037, 1040, 1044

Taylor, Mr John M, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept
Questions
Arbitration schemes 156-7w, 233-4w
Baliffs, Leicester 656w
County courts, Repossession orders 656w
Court Service, Civil service agencies 657-8w
Courts, Battered women 16
Courts, Privatisation 14-5
Crown courts, Trials 70-1w
Divorce, Children's rights 13-4
Immigration appeals 69-70w, 316w
Judiciary, Public appointments 657w
Judiciary, Training 656w
Landlord & tenant, Law reform 16-7
Legal aid 15-6
Legal aid, Battered women 15
Legal aid, Women 16

Taylor, Mr John M—continued
Legal aid scheme 17
Legal profession, Equal opportunities 657w
Legal profession, Student grants 656-7w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Annual reports 69w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Computer privacy 315-6w
Lord Chancellor's Dept, Select Committee reports 361-2w
Magistrates, Ethnic minorities 69w
Magistrates' courts, Information 69w
Negligence, Handicapped children 361w
Official visits, Cyprus 157w
Public defenders 361w
Solicitors, Rights of audience 17-8
Stockton on Tees County Court 14

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
Crime, Devon 241-2w

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 384-5
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 653-5
Questions
EC external trade 225w
Shipping, Spain 332w

Teacher training
492-3w, 652w
Dyslexia 292w
Handicapped pupils 24w, 53w
Higher education colleges 553w
Wales 553w

Teachers
Pay 495-6w

Technical assistance
Science & technology research 233w

Technicians
Clinical laboratories 195w, 579w

Technology foresight programme
(26:05:93) 923-37

Technology transfer
Expenditure 228w

Teesside
Manufacturing industries 227

Telecommunications industry
UK companies abroad 450-1w

Telephone services
Warren Spring Laboratory 342w

Telephone tapping
Clark, Alan 333w

Telephones
Palace of Westminster 651w

Television
Manpower 122-3w

Television licences
Tax evasion 66w

Television reception
480w
Pendle 599w

Temple, Russell
Compensation 243w

Templeton Airfield
Aerials 455w

Temporary accommodation
Wales 708w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (20:05:93) 381

"Tenant Involvement Consultation Paper"
702-3w

Tenants' incentive scheme
353-4w

Terminal care
Income support 445-6w
Yorkshire & Humberside 445-6w

Terrorism
12
Compensation 325-6w
Northern Ireland 325-6w, 352-4, 500w

"Testing: The Facts"
168-9w, 333w, 601w

Textile industry
Clothing industry 221w
EC grants & loans 228-30
Scotland 728-9w
Strathclyde 728-9w
Trade fairs 118w

Textiles
South Korea 693w

[illegible]
Hospitals 469w
Social security payments 186w

Thomason, Mr Roy
Questions
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Science & technology policy 596-7w

Thompson, Sir Donald
Debates etc.
British Waterways Bill (HL), 2R (17:05:93) 111
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 668
Whales (17:05:93) 23
Questions
Arms trade, Kuwait 141
Employment level 744
Estate Action, Yorkshire & Humberside 917

Thompson, Mr Jack
Questions
Western European Union, Greece 102w

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Export promotion (21:05:93) 519-24

Thorn Cross Youth Custody Centre
Prison education services 477w

THORP
100w, 610w
Licensing 225-6w
Sellafield 486w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Questions
Secure accommodation, Voluntary schools 193-4w

Tibet
China 659-60w

Tied housing
Clergy 71w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Pension funds 369w, 450w
Coal mine closures, Government assistance 222-3w
Community charge, Non-payment 360w
Energy Advisory Panel, Public appointments 344w
Enterprise zones, Mansfield 702w
Fire engines, Emergency planning 62w
Fire services, Marchington 475-6w
Group 4 Securitas, Company registration 120w
Group 4 Securitas, Prisoner escorts 68w
Health hazards, Condensation 578w
Lowdham Grange Young Offenders' Institution, Property transfer 67-8w
Package holidays, EC law 450w
Police authorities 725w
Railway network, Nottinghamshire 414w
Schools 661w
Secure accommodation 477w

Tipping of waste
98w
Fees & charges 174-5w

Tipping of waste—continued
Methane 359w

Tobacco duties
Tax yields 283w

Tools for self reliance
380w

Top Salaries Review Body
536-8w

Tourism
244w
Environment protection 135w
Northern Ireland 291w, 358-9
Republic of Ireland 291w
Wales 135w

Tourist attractions
Wales 52w

Tourist industry
126w
Balance of payments 111w

Tourists
Stratford-on-Avon 478w
Wales 645-6w

Tower Hamlets
Income support 136w

Tower Hamlets Housing Action Trust (Area & Constitution) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 584

Town & country planning
Wales 714w

Town & Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987
Questions
57w

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Questions
Cyprus, Trade barriers 46w
Tanker ships, Sea navigation 85-6w

Toxic shock syndrome
732w

Toxicity of Chemicals in Food Etc Committee
151w

Tracey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 249
Questions
Assisted places scheme, Parental contributions 602w

Trade barriers
151-2, 488-9w
Cyprus 46w

Trade fairs
Arms trade 510-1w
Clothing industry 118w
Government grants 118w
Textile industry 118w

Trade marks
34w

Trade missions
50w
Welsh Office 547-8w

Trade names
Diethylistilboestrol 508w

Trade policy
235

Trade unions
Government Communications Headquarters (18:05:93) 169-70

Trafford
Electorate 509w
Hospitals (18:05:93) 161-3

Training
Disabled workers 739-40
European Social Fund 622w

Training—continued
Judges 731w
Judiciary 656w
Managers 547w
North West region 739
Scotland 746-7
South East region 737
Wales 9
Young people 735, 740-1, 744-5

Training & enterprise councils
8, 128-9w, 132w, 550-1w, 739
Day care of children 469w, 525w
New businesses 551w
North West region 519w
Small businesses 288w
Wales 8-9

Training credits
218w, 518w, 735, 739-40, 743, 747
Take-up 746-7
Vocational training 520w

Training for work
519w, 524-5w, 646w

Trans European mobility scheme for university students
Science education 106w

Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981
Questions
97w, 241w, 615w

Transitional arrangements
Council tax 367w, 910

Transport
Planning permission 237w
South East region 409w

Transport Act 1968
Questions
414w

Transport of radioactive materials
Erskine Bridge 455w
Nuclear weapons 81w, 230w
Plutonium 89w, 156w, 683w
Railway freight transport 332w
Sea transport 89w, 683w

Transport policy
Environment protection 415-6w

Transport Research Laboratory
683-4w

Transport supplementary grants
156w
Greater London 91-2w

Travel agents
Insolvency 226-7

Travel cards
Greater London 571w

Travel concessions
British Rail 2w, 407w

Travel requirements
Refugees 435w, 721-2w

Travel to interview scheme
Northern Ireland 461w, 597-8w

Travelling people
Caravan sites 616w

Travel-to-work areas
525w

Trawsfynydd power station
Plutonium 638w

Treasury
663w
Civil service dispersal 421w
Computer privacy 282w
Operating costs 110w
Parliamentary questions 14w
Select Committee reports 417w

Treaties
Mines 101w

Treaty on European Union
364, (20:05:93) 381-471, 748-9

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Business start-up scheme, East Midlands 518-9w
Environment protection, Government achievements 619w
GATT, Clothing industry 229-30

Trend, Mr Michael
Questions
Royal Palaces Fire Protection Measures Inquiry 600w

Trials
Crown courts 70-1w
Magistrates' courts 70-1w
Sexual offences 448-9w

Triazolam
Drug side effects 577w

Tribunals
Child Support Act 1991 297w

Trident
455w
Operating costs 81w

Trident missiles
147

Trident submarines
Repairs & maintenance 143

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Bombings, Northern Ireland (27:05:93) 1036
Bombings, Standing Order No 20 applications (24:05:93) 581
Oral questions, Points of order (20:05:93) 380
Questions
Flags, Northern Ireland 325w
Legislative process, Administrative delays 292w
Ministers' domestic visits, Upper Bann 501w
Rapid reaction corps 141w
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 353-4

Trotter, Mr Neville
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 299-300, 327-30
Questions
Army 80w
Swan Hunter Shipbuilders, Shipbuilding Intervention Fund 583w

Tuberculosis
Vaccination 31-2w
World Health Organisation 570

Turkey
Foreign policy 514w

Twinn, Dr Ian
Questions
British Antarctic Survey 157-8w

Twyford Down
156w, 570w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Agricultural subsidies, Integrated administration & control system (18:05:93) 190-3
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 884-6
Disclosure of information, Points of order (18:05:93) 157
Questions
Integrated administration & control system 24-5w, 243w
Integrated administration & control system, Administrative costs 243w

Ucar Carbon
224-5

UK companies abroad
Telecommunications industry 450-1w

UK contributions
International Planned Parenthood Federation 21w
Peace keeping operations 42w, 141w
UN Population Fund 21w
United Nations 376-8w
Western European Union 81w

UK delegations
286w, 575w, 589w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 230w, 678-9w
UN Conference on Environment & Development 350w

Ukraine
Cruise missiles 262w

Ulster Defence Regiment
(26:05:93) 942

UN
see United Nations

UN Commission on Sustainable Development
283w

UN Compensation Commission
(18:05:93) 205-10

UN Conference on Environment & Development
18w, 415-6w
UK delegations 350w

UN Conference on Human Settlements
178-9w

UN Convention on Biological Diversity
155w, 180w

UN Development Programme
589w
Non-governmental organisations 101w

UN Environment Programme
357w, 617w

UN High Commissioner for Refugees
163-4w, 251w, 349w

UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission
Armed forces casualties 625w

UN Operation in Somalia
142w

UN Population Fund
20-1w
UK contributions 21w

UN Protection Force
369w

UN Security Council
372w
USA 373-4w

UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia
45-6w

Unemployed
Scotland 497w

Unemployment
131w, 216w, 526w, 746
Building industry 131w
Coventry 525w
Disabled workers 621-2w
Ethnic groups 313w
Graduates 131-2w
Greenwich 519w
Holloway 519-20w
Liverpool Riverside 131w
Men 465w
Merseyside 131w, 747
Northern Ireland 359-60
Northern region 520w
Occupational pensions 637w
Press releases 526w
Statistics 519w
Wales 55-6w, 313-4w, 329w
West Midlands 525w

Unemployment benefits
128w
Earnings rules 72w

Unemployment benefits—continued
Occupational pensions 562-3w

Unfair dismissal
Pregnant women 249w

Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Compensation Limit) Order 1993
Debates etc.
(24:05:93) 728

UNICEF
Non-governmental organisations 101w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
Public appointments 490w

United Kingdom NIREX
904

United Kingdom Passport Agency
Contracts for services 97w
Management 427w
Privatisation 97w

United Kingdom Sports Commission
(17:05:93) 29-70

United Kingdom Warning & Monitoring Organisation
204w, 566w

United Nations
149, 575w
Human rights 574-5w
Peace keeping operations 42w, 46-7w
UK contributions 376-8w

University of Wales
Manpower 467-8w
Student numbers 467-8w

Unruly children
407w
Dyslexia 401w
Schools 553w
Wales 553w

Upper Bann
Ministers' domestic visits 501w

Upper Waiting Hall
Exhibitions 170w, 380w

Upwards-only Rent Review Clauses (Abolition) Bill 1992/93
Debates etc.
(18:05:93) 158-60

Urban areas
Road construction 416w

Urban programme
701w
Manchester 618w
Sports centres 735w

USA
45w, 450-1w, 666-7w
Aerospace industry 453w
Military intervention 163w
Official visits 291w
UN Security Council 373-4w

Vacancies
AWE Aldermaston 80w
Wales 327w

Vaccination
Tuberculosis 31-2w
Whooping cough 191-2w

Vale of Glamorgan
Local government reform 50w

Valuation
Council tax 114w, 699w

Vance Owen peace plan
513w, 516w

Vandalism
Railway track 685w

VAT
Energy prices (18:05:93) 188-90, 535w
Fuels 281w

VAT returns
113w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Company liquidations 116w
Legal aid scheme 17
Local authority powers 919
Polly Peck, Serious Fraud Office 85w
Radio Authority, Franchising 124w
Radio broadcasting licences 124w
Radio broadcasting licences, Ethnic minorities 124w
Radio broadcasting licences, West Midlands 124w
Rushdie, Salman 122w
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 557w
Urban programme 701w

Vehicle Inspectorate
683-4w

Venereal diseases
Elderly 675w

Ventilation
Building regulations 619-20w

Vice squads
60-1w

Vickers Shipbuilding & Engineering
511w, 626-7w
Defence contracts 627w
Defence procurement 626w

Victim Support
see National Council of Victim Support

Victim support schemes
Government grants 96-7w

Victim's Charter
13w

Video equipment
Retail prices 110w

Video recordings
Police interrogation 294w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Procurement Executive, Offices 83w

Violence
Health service staff 469w

Visas
Croatia 165w
Yugoslavia 252-3w

Vista UDM
229w

Vocational training
Tax allowances 281w
Training credits 520w

Voluntary organisations
Probation & aftercare 339w
Wales 11

Voluntary schools
Secure accommodation 193-4w

Voting behaviour
Council of Ministers 250w
EC Industry Council 452w

Wages councils
523w, 736-7

Wakefield
Assisted areas (25:05:93) 894-902

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Debates etc.
Science & technology policy, Ministerial statements (26:05:93) 923-37
Questions
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Select Committee reports 568w

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William—continued
Citizen's Charter 85w
Contracts for services, Cost effectiveness 322-3w
HMSO 562w
Office of Public Service & Science, Contracts for services 363-4w
Science & technology research, Technical assistance 233w

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 290

Wales
14w, 128w, 489w, 650w, 707w, (26:05:93) 949-1015
Agriculture 53w, 470w, 544-5w
Agri-environment action plan 135w
Assisted areas 713w
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy 135-6w
British Columbia 50w
Building industry 642w, 644w
Burglary 238-40w
Business start-up scheme 709w
Cattle 649w
Cereals 714w
Chemists shops 468w, 639w
Company management 639w
Council housing management 717-8w
Council tax 638w
Council tax exemptions 555-6w
Day care of children 469w, 552-3w
Dentists 470-1w
Diabetes 3, 709w
Disability living allowance 53w
Disabled workers 312w
Discretionary student grants 554w
Drug abuse 169w, 545w
EC Committee of the Regions 3-5
EC grants & loans 472w
EC regional policy 50w
Education 2-3, 466-8w
Educational assessment 314w
Educational qualifications 328w
Educational standards 8
Employment 329w, 466w
Employment schemes 646w
Empty housing 708w
Enterprise allowance scheme 710w
Exports 710w
Eye tests 311w
Fishing 8-9
Foreign companies in UK 552w
Foreign investment in UK 548-50w
Fox hunting 312w
Free school meals 706w
Further education colleges 9
Government grants to local authorities 648w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 10
Grant maintained schools 49w, 545w
Handicapped pupils 53w
Hard core unemployed 329w
Health authorities 51w
Health service staff 469w
Hearing aids 170w
Hospital doctors 52w
Hospital waiting lists 7-8
Hospitals 469w
Housing 644-5w
Housing construction 646w
Hydatid disease 312w, 327w
In vitro fertilisation 650w
Income support 457-8w, 633-4w, 706w
Industrial estates 710w
Industrial injuries scheme 56w
Industrial production 638w
Integrated administration & control system 544w, 649w, 712w
Invalidity benefits 56-7w
Local authorities 326w
Local government expenditure 648w
Local government finance 11
Local government reform 135w, (18:05:93) 194-5, 647w, 716-7w
Local government staff 647w
Managers 547w
Medical research 311w
Mortgage defaulters 310-1w

Wales—continued
Mortgage interest rates 328w
Mortgages 645w
Nature conservation 551-2w
Negative equity 646w
Negligence 170w
New businesses 554w
NHS Joint Staff Consultative Councils 556w
NHS trusts 3, 134-5w, 709w, 716w
Nitrate sensitive areas 711w
Non-departmental public bodies 545w
One stop shop initiative 470w
Parliamentary constituencies 237w
Part-time employment 329w
Pay 465-6w
Performing arts 647w
Pharmacies 467-8w
Pharmacists 52-3w, 312-3w, 639w
Planning permission 646w
Police 648w
Pregnant women 467w
Probation supervision grants scheme 205w
Public appointments 169w, 465w, 714-6w
Public libraries 647w
Radon gas 711w
RECHAR 51w
Recycling 706w
Reed beds 640-2w
Regional enterprise grants 705-6w
Regional planning & development 49w
Regional selective assistance 646-7w, 705-6w
Research 5-6
Road works 49w
Rural planning 50-1w
Self-employed 13w, 183-4w, 310w, 709-10w
Set-aside schemes 713w
Sheep 718w
Slaughterhouses 311-2w, 648w, 713w
Small businesses 134w, 309-10w, 711-2w
Social workers' training 51-2w
Special education 643-4w
Special protection areas 553-4w
Special schools 641-3w
Student grants 1-2
Student numbers 2
Sustainable development 51w
Teacher training 553w
Temporary accommodation 708w
Tourism 135w
Tourist attractions 52w
Tourists 645-6w
Town & country planning 714w
Training 9
Training & enterprise councils 8-9
Unemployment 55-6w, 313-4w, 329w
Unruly children 553w
Vacancies 327w
Voluntary organisations 11
Water charges 467w
Water supply 709w
Water treatment 711w
Wetlands 553-4w
Wind power 6
Working hours 11
Young offenders 553w
Youth training 9, 544w

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 396, 460
Rosyth Dockyard, Nuclear safety (18:05:93) 211-5
Questions
Defence expenditure 142
Northern Ireland government 357
Training credits 747

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 691-3, 698

Wallasey
Youth unemployment 742-3

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 718-9
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 839-41
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 166-7w

Waller, Mr Gary—continued
Members' facilities, Information technology 104-5w
Official Report, CD-ROM 380w
VAT returns 113w

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (24:05:93) 563
Questions
Buses 1w, 87w
Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty 84w
East London river crossing, Oxleas Wood 557
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, UK delegations 230w
Palace of Westminster, Building regulations 171w
Palace of Westminster, Manpower 171w
Police authorities, Accountability 93w
Railway freight transport, Transport of radioactive materials 332w
Royal residences, Fire regulations 124-5w
Social security payments, Post offices 137w
Sustainable development 234w
TASM 261w
Wastes, Freight transport 87w

Walsall Borough Council
Concessionary fares 458-9w

Wandsworth
Government grants to local authorities 915

War crimes
Bosnia-Herzegovina (18:05:93) 178-81
Croatia 162w
Falkland Islands 266w

War games
Paint ball guns 37-8w

War Pensions Agency
564w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 953, 957
Questions
Bomb disposal, Gower 679w
Diabetes, Blindness 709w
Diabetes, Health services 3
Disabled workers, Local government staff 312w
Housing construction, Planning permission 357w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 418w
Integrated administration & control system, Wales 544w
Local plans, Welsh districts 53-5w
NHS trusts, Hospital consultants 709w
Offensive weapons, Import controls 161w
Planning permission, Wales 646w
Tipping of waste, Fees & charges 174-5w
Turkey, Foreign policy 514w
Waste management, Licensing 99-100w
Water supply, Lead pollution 709w

Wardle, Mr Charles, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Fire services (27:05:93) 1066-71
Human rights (27:05:93) 1029-34
Prestwick Airport, Immigration controls (27:05:93) 1075-8
Questions
Arbitration schemes 567-8w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Refugees 95w
British nationality 196w
Civil servants, Contracts for services 565w
Crime, Racial conflict 338-9w, 435w
Departmental correspondence, Hong Kong 210w
Firearms certificates 93w
Football, Arrests 474w
Home Office, Contracts for services 475-6w
Illegal immigrants, Deportation 433w
Imitation guns 237-8w
Immigrant detainees, Deportation 433w
Immigrant detainees, Detention centres 434-5w

Wardle, Mr Charles—continued
Immigrant detainees, Illegal immigrants 434w
Immigrant detainees, Political refugees 434w
Immigration, Advisory services 718w
Immigration appeals 722w
Immigration applications 96w
Mohammed, Abdullahi, Members' correspondence 341w
Naturalisation, Administrative delays 567w
Obscene Publications Act 1959 62w
Police 340-1w, 427w
Police, Computer applications 724w
Police, Evidence 425-6w
Police, Manpower 566w
Police, Private sector 210w
Police authorities 565w, 725w
Police authorities, Accountability 93w
Police authorities, Management 567w
Police Responsibilities & Rewards Inquiry 61w
Political refugees, Angola 425w
Racial attacks, Crime prevention 239-40w
Refugees, Travel requirements 435w, 721-2w
Refugees, Yugoslavia 435w
Vice squads 60-1w
Visas, Croatia 165w
Witnesses 60w

Warehouses
426w

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 145
Assisted areas 691w
Blood donors 331w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 44-5w, 579
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Military aircraft 84w, 681w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Peace keeping operations 253w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Prisoners 254w
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rape 348w
Brewing industry 691-2w
Council house sales, Advertising 702w
Croatia, Human rights 252-4w
Croatia, Overseas trade 121w
Croatia, Prisoners 574w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Press advertising 490w
European Parliament constituencies 724w
Food poisoning 259w, 676w
Food poisoning, EC countries 676w
Food poisoning, Northern Ireland 688w
Health authorities, Public appointments 670-5w
Hospitals, Patients' transport 670w
Know-how Fund 349-50w
Serbia, Sanctions 45w, 349w
Tax allowances, Northern Ireland 664w
Yugoslavia, Visas 252-3w

Warner Committee
see Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry

Warnings
Emergency planning 204w, 566w

Warren Spring Laboratory
690w
Glaxo 342w
Property transfer 690w
Telephone services 342w

Warrington
Housing benefits 139-40w

Warships
Marine fuels 346w

Waste disposal
Sewage 614w

Waste management
174-5w, 690w
Licensing 99-101w, 173-4w

Waste Management Industry Training & Advisory Board
100-1w

Wastes
Freight transport 87w

Water & sewerage companies
Pay 357-8w
Price increases 357-8w

Water charges
Debts 467w
Lothian 269w
Strathclyde 269w
Strathclyde Regional Council 211w
Wales 467w

Water pollution
EC law 176w, 290w, 354w
Germany 179w
Northern Ireland 290w

Water supply
Lead pollution 176w, 709w
Local government borrowing 14w
Wales 709w

Water supply disconnections
Environmental health 697-8w

Water supply industry
Privatisation 155-6
Scotland 155-6, 366

Water treatment
Wales 711w

Watson, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 386-7
Questions
Developing countries, Family planning 590w
Further education colleges, Pay incentives 279w
NHS complaints 670w
Non-governmental organisations, Family planning 590-2w

WE 177 nuclear bomb
454w

Wellhouse NHS Trust
Manpower 505w

Wells, Mr Bowen
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 606

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Questions
British Rail, Privatisation 412w
Housing construction, Dundee 39w
Water supply industry, Privatisation 155-6

Welsh Development Agency
311w
Government grants 547w

Welsh districts
Local plans 53-5w

Welsh language
Integrated administration & control system 554w

Welsh Language Bill (HL) 1992/93
Debates etc.
2R & Money res* (26:05:93) 949-1015

Welsh Language Board
(26:05:93) 949-1015

Welsh Office
Computer privacy 472w
Contracts for services 555w
Select Committee reports 713w
Trade missions 547-8w

West Africa
Beef 172w, 363w

West Coast railway line
Employment opportunities 90w
Railway maintenance 408w
Railway travel 408w

West Midlands
Chemists shops 261w
Community action 745-6

West Midlands—continued
Day nurseries 525w
Homelessness 180w
Radio broadcasting licences 124w
Unemployment 525w

West Midlands Regional Health Authority
Health service staff 670w
Public appointments 195w

Western European Union
678w
Defence expenditure 79-81w
Greece 102w
UK contributions 81w

Westminster Foundation for Democracy
568

Wetlands
Wales 553-4w

Whales
Ministerial statements (17:05:93) 19-28

Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
Forensic Science Service 210w
National Board for Crime Prevention 725-6w
Thorn Cross Youth Custody Centre, Prison education services 477w

Whitefield School Nelson
Diphtheria 29-30w

Whitehall Export Promotion Committee
(21:05:93) 481-540

Whittingdale, Mr John
Questions
First aid, Curriculum 402-3w
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 93-4w

Whooping cough
Vaccination 191-2w

Wicks, Mr Malcolm
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 580
Divorce, Children's rights 13-4
London Regional Transport, Crimes of violence 407w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Christmas bonus, Social security benefits rates 323w
Dept of Social Security, Computer applications 457w
Dept of Social Security, Computer privacy 138-9w
Dept of Social Security, Government buildings 694w
Dept of Social Security, Parliamentary questions 77-8w
Early retirement, Pensions 637w
Handicap benefits, Administrative delays 562w
National insurance contributions, Self-employed 183-4w
Occupational pensions 139w
Occupational pensions, Unemployment 637w
Parliamentary questions, Civil service agencies 72-3w
Pension funds 637w
Pensions, EC countries 187w
Pensions, Social security payments 185-7w
Quarry House, Construction costs 635w
Retirement pensions, Social security payments 635w
Retirement pensions, Social security benefits reductions 139w
Social security abuse 188-9w
Social security abuse, Identity cards 693w
Social security benefits, Administrative delays 324-5w, 458w
Social security benefits, Sex discrimination 73-6w
Social Security Benefits Agency, Contracts for services 296-7w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann—continued
Social security benefits rules, Self-employed 137w
Social security payments 557w
Social security payments, Automated credit transfer 137w, 187w, 297w, 455-7w, 557w, 636-7w
Social security payments, Post offices 137w, 631w
Social security payments, Theft 186w
State earnings related pension scheme, Social security recipients 323-4w

Widows
Personal tax allowances 533-4w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 250
British Wool (Guaranteed Prices) (Revocation) Order 1993 (25:05:93) 886
Cardiff Prison, Points of order (21:05:93) 480
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 433-5
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 824
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 955, 958, 973, 984-9, 991, 1001, 1012
Questions
Cancer, Non-ionizing radiation 147w
Cerebral palsy, Medical research 30w
Contraceptives, Limited list prescribing 576w
EC Committee of the Regions, Wales 4-5
European Parliament elections 368w
Foreign companies in UK, Manpower 552w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 548-50w
Income support, Wales 458w, 633-4w
Multiple births 444-5w
Multiple births, Northern Ireland 501-2w
Multiple births, Scotland 498-500w
New businesses, Wales 554w
Non-ionizing radiation, Environmental research 176w
RECHAR, Wales 51w
Regional aid 485-6w
Regional aid, Expenditure 485w
Regional selective assistance, Wales 705-6w
Welsh Development Agency, Government grants 547w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 306, 322-4, 329
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 383
Questions
Armed forces deployment, Belize 145
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 576
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 353

Willetts, Mr David
Questions
Company finance 451w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 664, 667, 672-3
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 828, 833
Questions
Royal family, Official visits 347w
Royal residences, Public expenditure 480-1w

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Welsh Language Bill (HL), 2R (26:05:93) 1000-3
Questions
Student grants, Wales 1-2
THORP, Licensing 225-6w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 648-9, 652-3, 675-7, 686-90, 699-700
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 763-6, 769, 772-4, 807-9, 815-6, 823, 830-2, 868-9
Questions
Bus services, Competition 563-4
Bus stations, Scotland 215w
River Thames, Bridges 3-4w

Wilton Park Executive Agency
Performance standards 254w

Wind power
Wales 6

Windsor Castle
600w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Automated credit transfer (19:05:93) 255
European Communities (Amendment) Bill, 3R (20:05:93) 385, 437-9, 459
Intelligence services, Points of order (26:05:93) 942
Prostitution, Stamford Hill (18:05:93) 164
Upwards-only Rent Review Clauses (Abolition) Bill, 1R (18:05:93) 160
Questions
Bosnia-Herzegovina, Armed conflict 575-6
Directors, Honours 225w
Disability living allowance, Concessionary fares 458-9w
Housing, Rural areas 907

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Abortion Clinics (Access) Bill, 1R (19:05:93) 243-4
Questions
Biological weapons, Arms control 82w
Brook Advisory Centres, Northern Ireland 360-1
Eastern Health & Social Services Board, Public appointments 160w
Genetically modified organisms 266-8w
Genetically modified organisms, Defence research 81-2w
Genetically modified organisms, Food labelling 24w
Genetically modified organisms, Licensing 39-40w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast 159-60w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Childbirth 159w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Hospital closures 159-60w
Jubilee Hospital Belfast, Midwives 687-9w
Publications 83w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 766-7, 786
Questions
Armed forces uniforms, Defence procurement 677w
Balance of trade 232
British embassies, Construction 375w
Building industry, Housing construction 916
Crossrail 369w, 408w, 536w
Dietary supplements 114-5w
Economic situation 368
Financial Services Act 1986 541w
Health services, Homelessness 442w
Suicide 442w
Youth unemployment, Cheshire 740

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Questions
Naturalisation, Administrative delays 567w

Withholding tax
666-7w
Entertainers 573w

Withybush Hospital
Building repairs 471-2w

Witnesses
60w
Children 205w
Northern Ireland 158w
Scotland 449w

Wolds Remand Prison
Prison staff 718-9w

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Railways Bill, Rep (24:05:93) 658, 672
Railways Bill, Rep & 3R (25:05:93) 820

Women
Legal aid 16

Women's employment
Sex discrimination 654-5w

Women's prisons
Sexual harassment 239w

Woodgrange Park Cemetery Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
2R order read (20:05:93) 351, (26:05:93) 903

Wool
Guaranteed prices (25:05:93) 875-92

Working hours
Dentists 257w
Junior hospital doctors 257w
Lorry drivers 483-4w
Non-departmental public bodies 366w
Wales 11

World Bank
658-9w

"World Energy Outlook to 2010"
286w

World Health Organisation
Tuberculosis 570

World War II
Festivals & special occasions 230w

Worthing
A27 (20:05:93) 472-8

Worthington, Mr Tony
Questions
Indonesia, Human rights 515w
Indonesia, Nuclear power 590w
Indonesia, Overseas aid 590w, 658-9w
Macedonia, Overseas aid 378w
Macedonia, Recognition of states 515-6w
Overseas trade, Developing countries 752
Speech impaired, Scotland 731w

Wright, Dr Tony
Questions
Armed forces dependants 625w
Birmingham relief road, Construction costs 86w
Birmingham relief road, Road construction 155w
Employment schemes 519w
Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 615w

Yeo, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Questions
Blind, North West region 505w
Child abuse, Parent & child 255-6w
Children, Deviance & behaviour disorders 447w
Children in care 146-8w
Children in care, Local government social services 667w

Yeo, Mr Tim—continued
Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry 150w
Dementia, Health services 147w
Drug abuse, Community care 330w
Educational health services 330-1w
Elder abuse 441w
Handicapped, Community care 506w
Health authorities, Public appointments 670-5w
Health services, Homelessness 442w
Hormone treatments, Counselling 668-9w
Hormone treatments, Creutzfeldt-Jakob dementia 669w
Hospital discharges, Pensioners 194w
Kearney, Jeremiah, Death 32w
Medical malpractice 329w
Mental Health Act 1983, Codes of practice 30w, 195w
Mental health services, Young offenders 436w
Mental hospitals, Hospital closures 667-8w
Mental illness, Medical research 32w
Mental illness, Surveys 193w
Persistent vegetative state 446w
Pharmacists, Pay 676w
Play groups, Government grants 147-8w
Post traumatic stress disorder, Counselling 446w
Public lavatories, Sleeping rough 193w
School nurses, Manpower 331w
Secure accommodation, Voluntary schools 193-4w
West Midlands Regional Health Authority, Health service staff 670w

York
Director of Passenger Rail Franchising 411w
Rail Regulator 411w

Yorkshire & Humberside
188-9w, 599w
Educational finance 384-5w
Estate Action 917
Terminal care 445-6w

Young, Mr David
Debates etc.
Defence industries (19:05:93) 313-5

Young, Sir George, Minister for Housing and Planning
Questions
Council housing, Empty housing 911-3
Council housing, Housing associations 181w
Council housing management, Contracts for services 181w
Empty housing 609-10w, 912
Empty housing, Council housing 913
Empty property, Government buildings 912-3
Homelessness 180w, 614-5w
Housing finance 530-1w
Lambeth Borough Council 912
Landlord & tenant, Law reform 698w
Local government maladministration 913

Young, Sir George—continued
Negative equity 366w
"Tenant Involvement Consultation Paper" 702-3w

Young offenders
Discrimination 553w
Mental health services 436w
Motor vehicle theft 428-34w
Prison accommodation 426w
Prison population 427-8w
Rape 66w
Supervision orders 433w
Wales 553w

Young people
Cancer 149-50w
Drug abuse 477w, 566w, 579w, 720w
Income support 78w, 309w
Training 735, 740-1, 744-5

Youth employment
Conditions of employment 522-3w
EC action (24:05:93) 728
Lambeth 520-1w

Youth opportunities programme
735

Youth services
Local government services 22w
Paisley 214w

Youth training
128-9w, 132w, 218w, 298w, 315-22w, 350-2w, 463-4w, 518w, 735-6, 743
Lambeth 520-1w
Pregnant women 544w
Renfrewshire 732-3w
Waiting lists 521w
Wales 9, 544w

Youth unemployment
132-4w, 518w, 739-42
Cheshire 740
Coventry 517w
Hampshire 742
Wallasey 742-3

Yugoslavia
Armed conflict 162w, 252w, 517w
Armed forces deployment 144w
Mercenaries 517w
Peace keeping operations 369w, 372w
Peace negotiations 372w
Refugees 378w, 435w
Sanctions 372w, 516w
Visas 252-3w

Zidovudine
Clinical trials 579w

Zoos
Export of live animals 364w